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THREE OF SALU

in Children of the World series



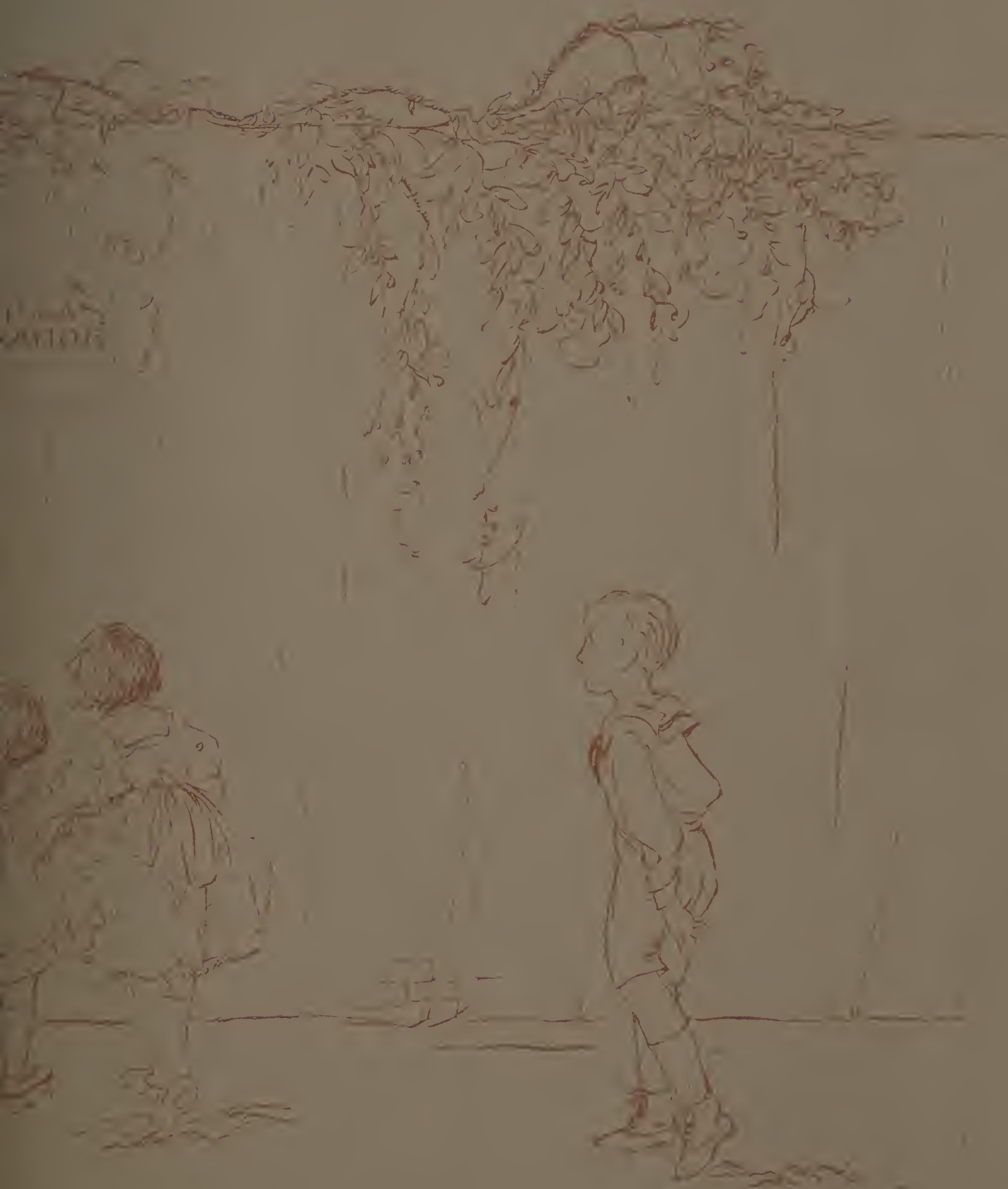


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THE THREE OF SALU



There was one old castle, so old
and forbidding that every time the
Three passed ... it awed them anew.

CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

THE THREE OF SALU

AROUND THE YEAR IN NORTHERN ITALY

BY
CAROL DELLA CHIESA



ILLUSTRATED BY
A. HELENE CARTER

1923

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THE HOUSE OF APPLIED KNOWLEDGE

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This little book is the fourth in the Children of the World, a series of books for young readers which are designed to open up to them the study of geography and history as living subjects. "Paz and Pablo: A Story of Two Little Filipinos," "Sunshine Lands of Europe," and "The Alo Man: Stories from the Congo" have already been published, and other volumes will be added to the series from time to time, until stories of the life of children in every land are told. The author of the present volume is a native of Italy, and she spent her childhood days among the scenes which she describes. The artist, equipped with a copy of the manuscript, made a special trip to the locality of the town in Italy herein described under the name of Salu, and completed her drawings for the book during her stay there. The publishers believe that in view of the intimate acquaintance of author and artist with their subject matter, an unusually authentic presentation of Italian child life has been secured in both story and picture

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THE THREE OF SALU

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTIONS

THE Three lived, when very little, in a small town of northern Italy, a very old and quaint place indeed.

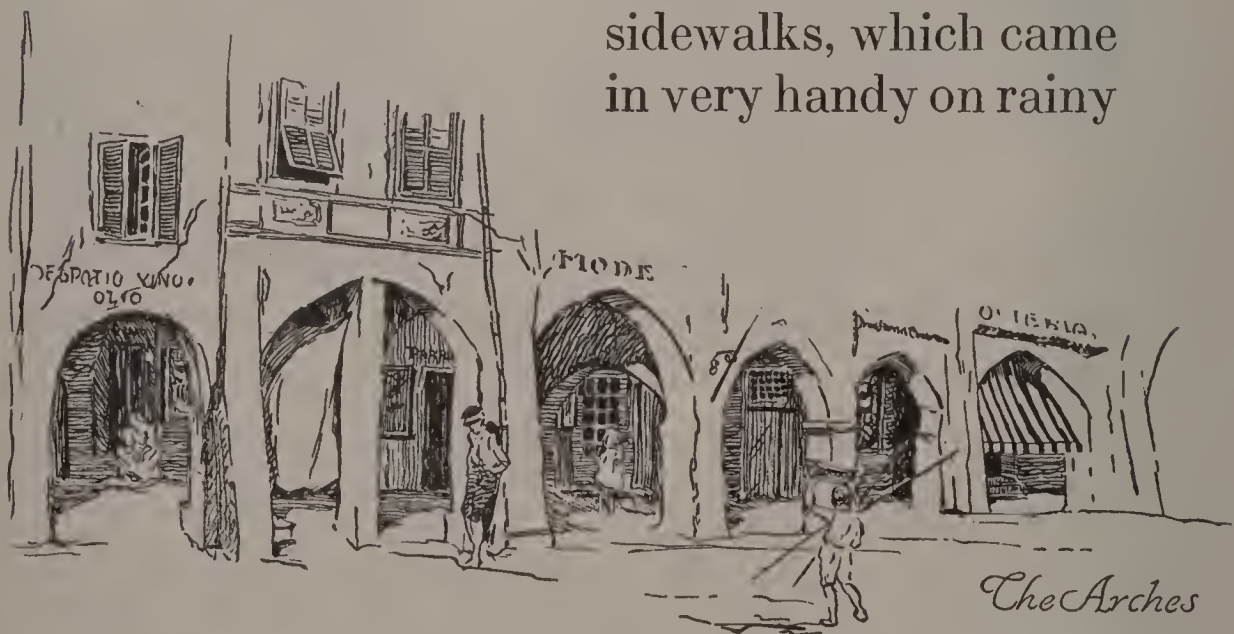
So old is the town of Salu that no doubt some of its streets and buildings remember the Romans, those wonderful people that lived in Italy a thousand and more years ago. Not only that; some of the streets and buildings are still, today, just as the Romans left them.

There was one old castle, so old and forbidding that every time the Three passed it on their walks, it awed them anew. It stood among the hills, with its towers, its high, steep walls, its moat, and its bridge, as it had stood there hundreds of years before. So many things had happened there, so many people had lived inside those grim red walls, that the children of Salu imagined they saw knights of old riding out of its gates to battle and ladies fair waving goodby to them from the towers.

The peasants about the countryside said the castle was haunted; that at night, sometimes, sounds of song and laughter came from it. Of course these were only tales; yet many believed them, and the Three did, too. How could they help believing them, when everything about the place was so strange, so weird!

There was among other things a long underground passage that wound itself in and out for miles in the hills around the castle and opened out at last on a mountain far away. It was said that the tunnel had been dug by prisoners in the castle who had wished to escape to France.

Some of the streets of Salu were wide and modern. Others were old and narrow and steep, and these were paved with big, round cobblestones, far from comfortable to walk upon. One of the features of the little town was the Arches, covered sidewalks, which came in very handy on rainy





*Among the hills of Salu
were many lovely villas.*

days, for under them people could stay in the open and still keep out of the rain. On Sunday afternoons the bands played there. All Salu turned out to hear them. The Three loved to listen to them, as they played the marches of their favorite regiments. *La Marcia dei Bersaglieri*, "The Sharpshooters' March," was the one they liked best of all, and they always clapped for it to be repeated.

Among the hills of Salu were many lovely villas. In Salu itself the houses, though roomy and cozy inside, when seen from the outside were far from pretty. Many were really

homely. But their homeliness was soon forgotten when one saw the many beautiful things — paintings, pictures, tapestries, and statues — with which they were filled.

Every one in Salu knew the Three. And the Three knew every one. They counted their friends among the poor and lowly, as well as among the rich. They treated the Bishop in his palace with the same friendly *tu*¹ they gave to the beggar who held out his hand to them at the church door.

It is true that more than once they had been reproved for saying “tu” to the Bishop and not the formal *Lei*, but Bianca’s argument to this had been:

“I say ‘tu’ to God; why can’t I say it to the Bishop?”

And the Bishop, when he heard about it, had laughed and given full permission for the “tu.”

The Three were Paolo, Clara, and Bianca, three children, full of fun and mischief, good at times and at times very bad.

Paolo was the pride of his mother’s heart, a good-looking, gray-eyed little lad. He was a very good playfellow and the recognized leader

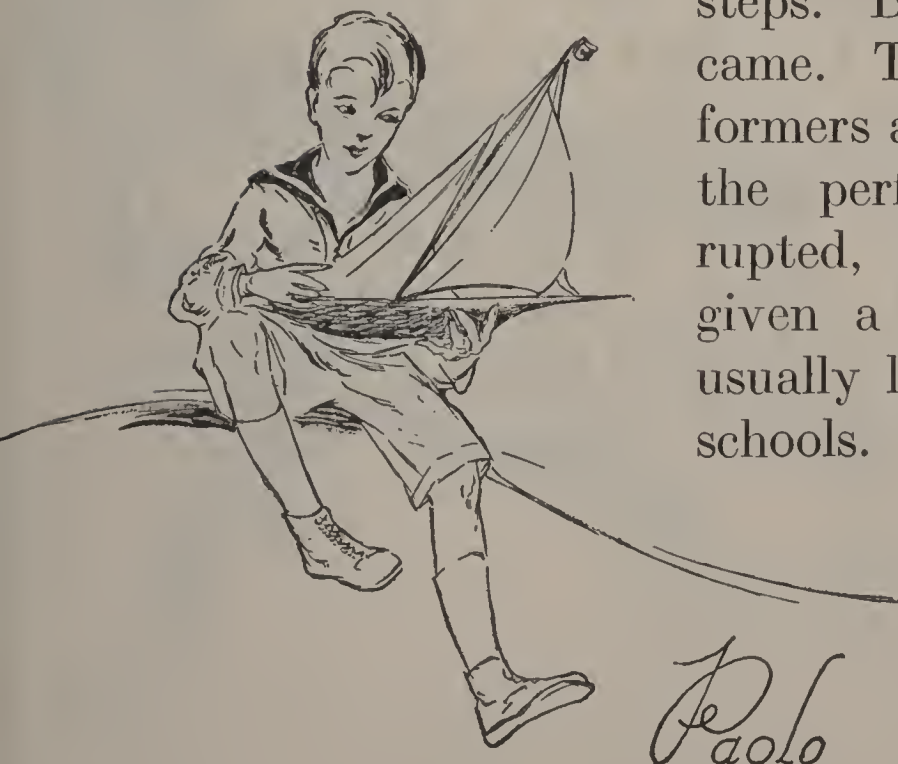
¹ Thou.

of the Three in games, in work, and in mischief. Early in life he showed a keen love for the pranks of boyhood, and even as a tiny chap he kept every one busy watching for his next adventure.

A favorite game of his was to play he was a marionette. He knew the marionettes well, having met them at the Marionette Theater, and he was always trying to imitate them. It was really surprising to see the tricks he succeeded in doing.

One day he was giving to his usual admiring audience of two, a daring exhibition of his progress as a trick performer. The trick for the day consisted in walking unaided across the balcony railing. The spectators watched, breathless with interest. Step by step the feat was accomplished. That over, Paolo started to help his little sisters to follow in his foot-

steps. But luckily prevention came. The mother of the performers appeared on the scene, the performance was interrupted, and the Three were given a lecture of the kind usually heard only in Sunday schools.



Clara was a quiet young person with a serious, independent outlook upon life in general. Her dark-blue eyes seemed always to be asking people questions.

On a lovely spring day the Three were taking a walk through the streets of Salu. It was just after the snows from the hills had begun to melt. The drainways in the middle of the streets were swollen with water. Clara, then about four years old, was enjoying both the walk and the talk with a young officer who was at the time one of her special favorites among her many friends. In crossing one of the streets, Clara's little legs proved a trifle too short to carry her over one of the swollen drainways. Help was offered, but politely declined. The next moment found Clara in a very undignified position right in the middle of a small river.

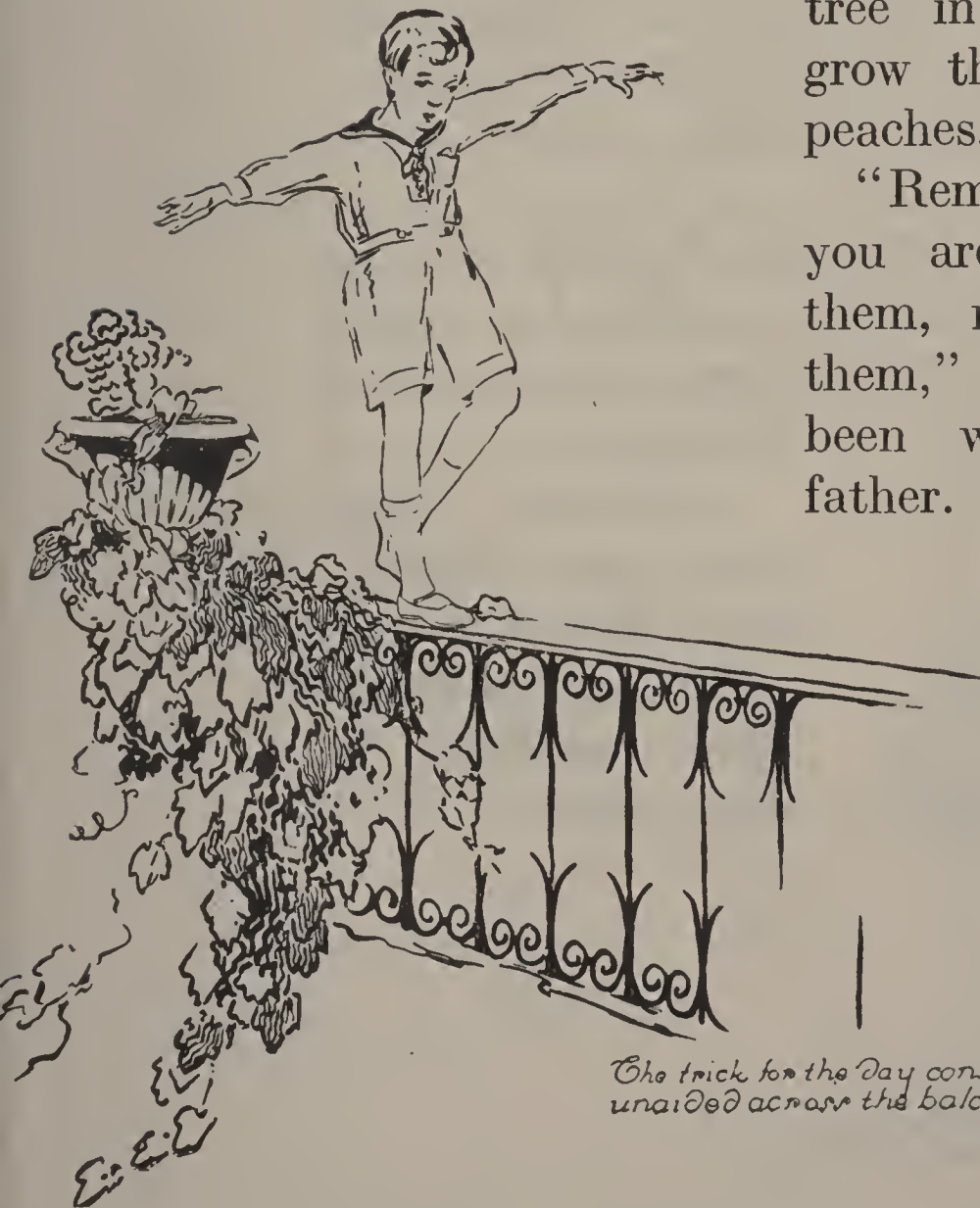
"Little Miss Independence, may I be allowed to assist now?" The officer tried bravely to keep a straight face, but the gallant bow that accompanied the request could not quite hide a smile.

Help was accepted, for there was nothing else to do, but a long time passed before Little Miss Independence forgot the enjoyment of her accident.

The third member of the company was Bianca; yet she was very seldom called by that dignified name. She was a great little mischief and led every one a dance. Her father called her Cricket, for she was never still a moment; her grandfather called her Ninette, for she was very little; and to her little friends she was nothing but Goldenhair, for her hair was long and thick and golden.

Cricket's father had succeeded, after much work, in coaxing a peach tree in the garden to grow three lovely yellow peaches.

"Remember, children! you are not to touch them, not until I pick them," the Three had been warned by their father.



The trick for the day consisted in walking unaided across the balcony railing.

The peaches grew bigger and more and more golden every day. At last a pretty pink spot appeared on each of them.

“There is just one for each of us,” Bianca suggested to her two companions one day.

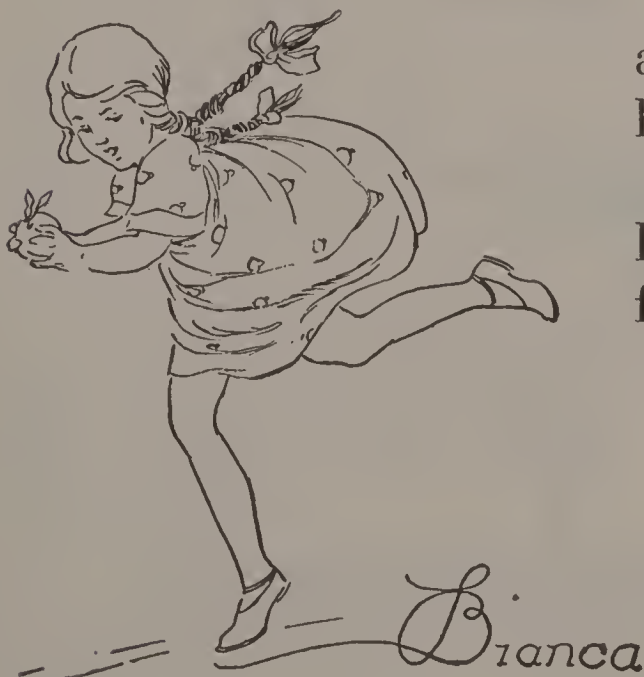
“Yes, but father told us not to touch them, Ninette,” Clara made haste to remind her sister.

Bianca loved her father dearly, but the peaches grew to be such a temptation, that the day came when she could no longer resist them. Before any one saw her, she had climbed up on a garden bench and the coveted peach was in her hand.

Her little teeth were ready to sink into the forbidden fruit, when she spied her father coming into the garden to show his peaches to a friend.

“Cricket, what are you doing?” he called out.

Cricket looked at him, smiling for forgiveness. What



she saw was a very stern face; so she turned and ran.

In and out of the garden paths she flew, with her father after her. Bianca was a swift runner, but she was only a very little girl, and she began to lose the race. Then a bright idea came into her head.

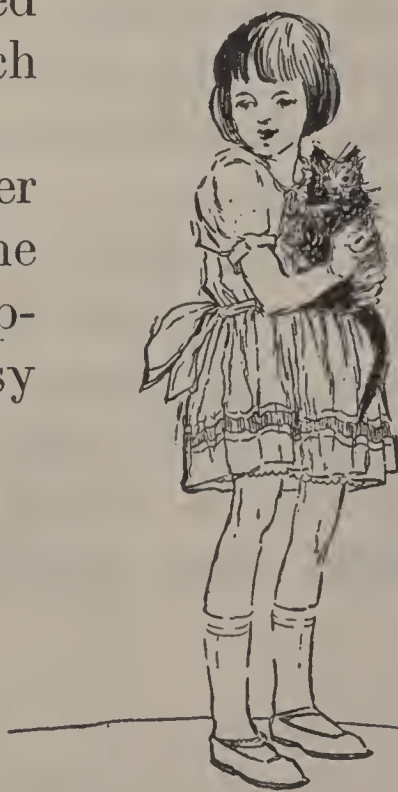
“The flower beds! Father won’t dare trample on them. But I can’t hurt them.”

And so back and forth across the flower beds she sped. For encouragement she could hear her grandfather’s voice urging her on:

“Run, Ninette, run!”

And Ninette did run — so fast that she was at last declared the winner of the race. Her father was too proud of his little daughter’s racing to scold her; so the peach was divided, and every one agreed it was the best peach he had ever tasted.

With their father and mother the Three were very happy, happy and busy



Clara

all day long. They were great friends and never far away from each other. They played together, walked together, and later studied together.

An important member of the household was Lisa. She was the Three's nurse and constant companion. She had been in the house for many years, and she held a high place in the hearts of her little charges. She was always ready to listen to joys or sorrows; she understood the Three, good or bad; she never scolded unless the scolding was well deserved. Moreover, she could tell the most wonderful fairy tales. Is it any wonder the little mischiefs in her care loved her well?

Toinette was the cook and the undisputed ruler of the kitchen. She did not allow any of the Three near that kitchen, and they did not dare to brook her anger.

"For she might get very angry and go away, and then we should have nothing to eat," Paolo had said once.

Then there were Marie, the maid, and Neta, the dressmaker who came to the house almost every day to help Lisa. Neta knew even more fairy tales than Lisa, and she had such a delightful way of telling them that Paolo and his sisters were always willing listeners.

To her, every strange house in the woods had a story to tell, every flower, every queerly shaped stone or twisted tree. She was the typical story-teller, of whom there are so many in Italy.

In Italy children are taught, even when very young, that early rising is the best of tonics. To this rule the Three had been brought up. As tiny tots they learned the lesson, and each bright morning saw them out of doors at an early hour. Not in the streets, however, for

among Italian children only the very poor who have no father or mother to look after them play in the streets. The others have to be satisfied to play in gardens or on balconies. Many homes in Italy have gardens. If not a garden, they have at least a balcony, and a balcony makes a fine playground.

When they were very little, Paolo, Clara, and Bianca were not among the lucky ones of the gardens. They had a balcony,



though, so wide and so full of lovely flowers that they enjoyed many a happy hour there. Yet they longed for a garden, and they often begged for it.

Almost every afternoon Lisa took her charges to spend a few hours at their grandparents' home. The Three loved everything about the old house, that for hundreds of years had belonged to their own people. It seemed to them that the very walls must love them as well as they loved the walls. They felt the house belonged to them, but that they belonged to it just as much.

Besides the house there was a fine old garden, so big that it was almost a park. To the children it was fairyland come to life. In it they could wander about for hours, it was so full of nooks and corners, real kingdoms for hide-and-go-seek and for all kinds of make-believe.

Flowers bloomed all over the place, and



Almost every afternoon Lisa took her charges to, ... their grandparents' home.

Paolo, Bianca, and Clara were allowed to pick to their hearts' content. The trees of the garden were so tall, their tops seemed to be lost among the clouds. In play, they were peopled with the giants and the fairies of story-land.

One tree was the children's great favorite. They called it Father's Tree. It had been planted as a tiny shrub when their father was born, and now the children saw it a giant pine, tall and straight.

But the greatest attraction to be found there by the little brother and sisters were two dear old people, *il Nonno*¹ and *la Nonna*,² as they called them. They thought them the best grandparents on earth, and the Nonni thought no children on earth were just like the Three.

Il Nonno had been in all the wars that Italy had fought for her independence, and he loved to tell of those days.

"*Miei cari piccoli*,"³ he would say to his attentive listeners, "those were great days! Our hearts burned with love for Italia, and oh, how we fought that she might be free!

¹ Grandfather.

³ My dear little ones.

² Grandmother.

Never forget what Italia stands for, *bimbi*,¹ freedom and right. Love her always, no matter where you may be."

The joyful news came to the Three one day that they were to move to a new house.

"And shall we have a garden?" they asked.

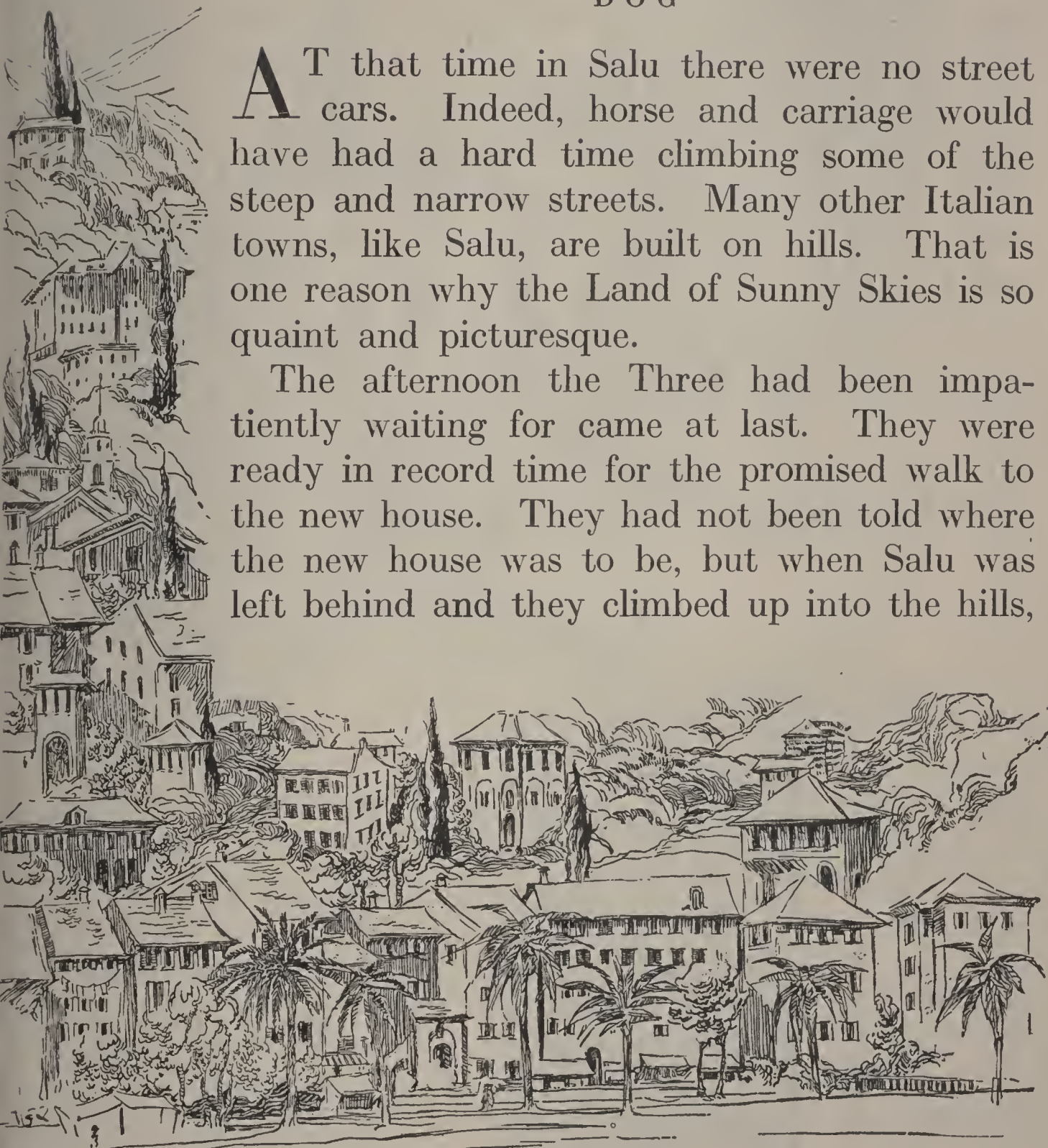
"Perhaps," answered their father. "*Chi lo sa?*"²

¹ Children.

² Who knows?

CHAPTER II

THE BIG HOUSE AND THE BIG DOG



AT that time in Salu there were no street cars. Indeed, horse and carriage would have had a hard time climbing some of the steep and narrow streets. Many other Italian towns, like Salu, are built on hills. That is one reason why the Land of Sunny Skies is so quaint and picturesque.

The afternoon the Three had been impatiently waiting for came at last. They were ready in record time for the promised walk to the new house. They had not been told where the new house was to be, but when Salu was left behind and they climbed up into the hills,

Many other Italian towns like Salu are built on hills.

they knew well they were to have the kind of home they had always wished and asked for.

The new home finally came into sight. A long avenue of tall trees stretched out before the three eager, impatient little people. At the end of the avenue a gate stood ready to open and smile a welcome, it seemed. Beyond the gate, the white walls and the dark roof of a big house showed against green trees and blue skies.

It took three pairs of feet only a very few minutes to reach that gate. Each child in turn had to be lifted up and allowed to use the knocker. There was a bell too, but the knocker looked much more inviting. In answer to the



At the end of the avenue a gate stood ready to open and smile a welcome.



*Beyond the gate, the
white walls and the dark
roof of a big house showed
against green trees and
blue skies.*

many knocks, the gate was opened by the old caretaker, who bowed and smiled as he ushered every one in.

Once inside, the Three with shrieks of joy were here, there, and everywhere at once. Their first thought was for the outdoors. They found all they wanted. There were two gardens, one near the house, the other a sunken garden reached by two stone stairs that looked most inviting. Trees, flowers, birds — all were there. The walks, the adventures, the digging, the planting, the mud pies, all would come true in time.

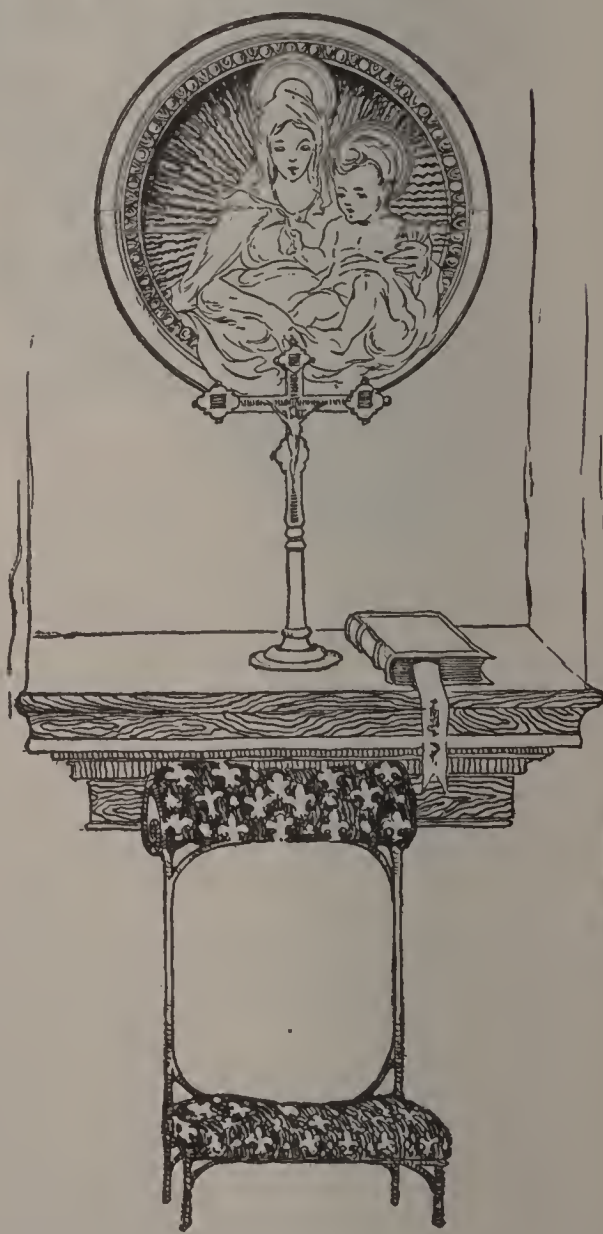
Back to their father and mother the Three flew with the news of their discoveries.

“And have you found the garden?” their father asked with a smile.

For answer he was treated to a hug, bear-style.

“And what about the house? Do you like it?”

Yes, the house too was declared just right. Such



big rooms, such cozy play corners! The nursery was voted on as perfect, the very place for telling fairy tales at story-hour time.

A surprise was in store for the children in the shape of a lovely little chapel in a room near their mother's. It was so quiet and peaceful there, that even three boisterous youngsters felt subdued and did not find it hard to think of God in it.

"We'll say our prayers here every morning," Clara decided for herself and her playmates.

Each nook and corner of the big house was explored with care, till the call came to go home.

"May we have the dog now, a great big one, big enough to play with?" begged Paolo, on the way home.

His father only smiled, and Paolo felt quite discouraged.

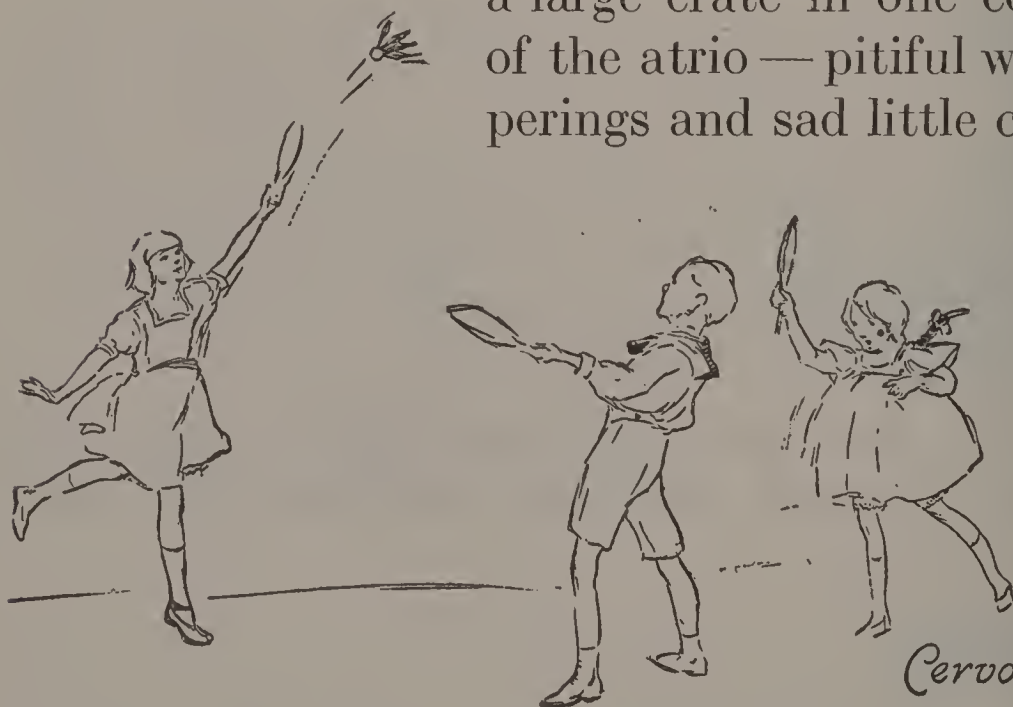
A few days passed in great excitement. The Three were packed away to spend a few days with the Nonni, to be out of the way of the grown-ups. But the day dawned at last when they found themselves settled in their new home, the Villa Grande.

Early one morning the children had gone down to their breakfast. Then they had

scampered out on the porch. It was a rainy, wet morning, and the garden was too damp a place for little folks to be in. Yet the big, roomy porch was good for almost any game. In Italy porches of country houses are much larger than those of American homes. They are called *atrios*. A better name for them would be a covered portico. In Spain and Mexico these interior covered places are named *patios*. The atrio of the Villa Grande was filled with flowers and plants, and the Three were almost as fond of it as they were of their garden.

Cervo volante, a favorite Italian game played with little feathered balls, was started. The balls were sailing swiftly through the air, when a strange series of sounds made the game come to a sudden stop. The sounds came from

a large crate in one corner of the atrio — pitiful whimperings and sad little cries.



Cervo volante.

It was easy to guess what the trouble was. Through the slats of the crate, what looked like a dog could be seen huddled on the floor. The children danced and jigged about with glee and then ran for help.

“Father, quick, please come and open this cage!” they called.

In a few minutes the poor prisoner was released.

“Why, father, you said we were to have a puppy,” cried out Paolo, his eyes shining with excitement. “This is a big dog now.”

“Yet it is only a puppy, and a very young one. He is only a few weeks old, but you see he is a wolf-hound and they are large, even when very young.”

Clara and Bianca were speechless. They seemed almost afraid of the big fellow before them. He was so big and so wobbly, he looked more like one of the young calves they had seen in the country than like a dog.

The pup stood up rather unsteadily at first and looked about him with great, soft brown eyes that begged for love.

Paolo was the first to accept the offered friendship. As soon as the friendly little hand touched him, out came the puppy's long, red

tongue and Paolo's face was given a friendly, loving kiss. This did not seem quite pleasant, judging by the look on Paolo's face. But it was the only way a lonely pup had of showing how good it felt to be loved.

Following their leader's example, Clara and Bianca soon found courage. In a short while the four had become fast friends.

Then the Three forgot the drizzle outside and raced into the garden, the dog at their heels. They had a fine romp, and many tumbles too, for the pup had no manners whatever. Indeed, he was far from being a gentleman; and as he was bigger than the Three put together, it is easy to see what happened when he ran into them.

The dog was christened Tom. This sounds like a funny dog-name in America. Different countries have different customs even in names, it seems. In America the name "Carlo" is often given to a dog; in Italy it is used only as a little boy's name.

In a week the Three and Tom were such friends that they were very seldom seen apart. Sad to say, however, it seemed for a time as if the friendship were to be broken. And Tom alone was to blame.

He was only a happy puppy, of course, yet every one began to feel it was hard to forgive him all his sins, much as they loved him. One day he tumbled a plant off its stand in the atrio and broke it into a thousand bits. Another day, in a wild, happy game with his little friends, he tore their clothing to shreds. The game he enjoyed more than any was to dig and dig in the garden, till there were holes as big as himself and dead and wounded flowers lying all about him. He listened to no one. He was looking for a good time, no matter where he found it or what mischief it led him into.

One sad day sentence was pronounced upon him. The Three begged and pleaded in vain. Their father was just like a stern judge in court. Tom was to go on a visit to Padre Giovanni's farm, till he could learn to behave himself.



*Paolo was the first to accept
the offered friendship.*

“When Padre Giovanni¹ says he is a gentleman-dog, you may have him back;” and so Tom went.

Poor Tom! He was a sorry-looking dog indeed, when Padre Giovanni led him away.

How lonely the Three were without him! But their loneliness lasted just one short week. At the end of that week, Padre Giovanni appeared at the villa one morning, leading a joyous Tom. Paolo, Clara, and Bianca ran wild with delight at seeing their good friend again.

They were surely going to hear that Tom had become a gentleman, they thought. On the contrary, this is what Padre Giovanni had come to say:

“I am sorry, sir. I’d like to keep your dog for you, but it is a little more than I can afford. He chases the cows, kills the chickens, scares the children. He has had chicken dinners every day this week, and he is not satisfied with one or even two chickens, sir. Yesterday he started a fight with a bull and nearly lost his own life. This morning he ran into the hen house and now there isn’t one chicken that can

¹ Father John; the title “father” or “zio” (uncle) is often given to old peasants in Italy.

boast of a tail-feather. Sorry, sir, you will have to take him back. He isn't a dog. He's a sirocco."¹

The father of the Three looked very stern, though trying his best not to burst out laughing. At first he said Tom was to go where he had come from, but in the end the children's pleadings won and Tom remained in his new home.

Poor fellow! He seemed to know he was on trial. Little by little he grew more gentle, till there came a day when he could be trusted to behave himself.

From that time he was the faithful companion of the three little scamps. He never left them. No harm could come to them when Tom was around. He went with them on their walks; he shared their games; he stretched before the nursery fire at story-hour time. From only one place was Tom barred — Padre Giovanni's farm.

¹ Windstorm.

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE CHIMNEY SWEEP

THE Three had moved to the villa in the fall of the year, when days were beginning to grow chill. They were too young and too happy, however, to let chilly days and falling leaves dampen their spirits. The flowers were dying one by one and the garden was growing bare, but with its bright carpet of leaves it seemed to become more beautiful as the days passed. Moreover, the woods all about were full of treasures for eager seekers to find. Life to them meant only smiles and happiness. They did not even dream there could be any one in the world who had never smiled.

One day they found out. A strange little boy came to the villa. Even to this day the Three remember him.

The rooms of the big villa grew cold and damp. The nursery needed the warmth of a crackling fire to keep little children comfortable. But the chimneys of the fireplaces needed cleaning and could not be used lest they catch fire. So the caretaker went to Salu to get the chimney sweeps.

The next day they came. There were two of

them. They passed the Three in the garden at their games. One was a boy of about sixteen, the other a little lad not more than nine or ten. He looked longingly at the children playing on the grass.

What a forlorn little fellow he was! Dressed like a man and nothing but a baby! His clothes, much too big for him, almost hid him. His face and his hands were black with soot; his hair was straggly and unkempt; his eyes, big and black, had a pleading, hungry look. From his shoulder hung a heavy leather bag, a brush, and a large dust pan, the signs of his trade. He was longing, no doubt, to throw them down and join the children in play.

“*Signorini*,¹ may I have a flower?” His voice was as soft as his eyes.

¹ Little gentlemen, little ladies.



*One was a boy of about sixteen,
the other a little lad not more
than ten.*

Bianca chose the biggest chrysanthemum she could find and went to him with it. His face brightened and his sad eyes smiled.

“*Grazie, signorina.*”¹

“Why doesn’t your nurse wash you and comb your hair?”

“Nurse — nurse? What is a nurse?”

“One who takes care of you when you are little. I have a nurse, and you are little, almost like me.”

“But you are a signorina and I am only a poor little chimney sweep.”

“Your mamma,² then. Doesn’t she know how to take care of you?”

“My mamma?” he burst out, and then without another word he ran into the house.

The Three looked at each other. Then they held a meeting. How could they help the little fellow? They rushed to their mother’s room like three young whirlwinds. Paolo was the spokesman, and he told the story. At the end, all together they begged for food and clothing for the small worker.

“Let him finish his work and then we shall make him happy,” was the mother’s answer.

The next trip took the Three to Toinette, to ask her to get a good meal ready. She was not

¹ Little lady.

² Little mother.

so easily persuaded as their mother had been, but at Clara's earnest pleadings she finally relented. Clara always had her way with ToINETTE.

Happy at their success, they started in search of the sweep to see what he was doing. They found him in the nursery getting ready for his work. A large cloth had been stretched on the floor to protect it from the sooty shoes. The boy stood in front of the fireplace with brush and pan in his hands. The big leather bag hung in front of him. With a quick leap he disappeared into the chimney. In a few seconds he had reached the top. Clara and Bianca could not see him, but Paolo, from his watching place under the chimney, told of the progress made. Soot began to sift downwards, however, and he had to retreat to a safe distance.

Though the little worker could not now be seen, he could be heard scraping and brushing busily away. The Three thought they were listening to a mouse making a hole in the wall. Patiently they waited for the sweep to reappear. He came down at last. But oh, what a sight he was! He had been dirty before; now he was as black as a little African. The only

white spots were about his eyes, and his flashing teeth as he smiled. He had worked hard, for his bag was full.

“Would you like to be clean like us?” Paolo asked him in a very blunt way.

“But I can’t be,” he answered. “If you played with soot all day long, you would be dirty, too. And I have to work with it.”

“Yes, but Lisa will make you clean today, and give you nice clothes like Paolo’s,” suggested Clara.

“You are very kind, little signorina, but I can’t, I can’t.” Yet as he spoke, his eyes grew wistful with the wish to be like other children.

Just then Lisa walked into the nursery and with much coaxing persuaded him to let himself be washed.

“And don’t forget that Toinette has a good dinner ready for you in the kitchen,” the Three called after him, as he disappeared into what he must have thought was a torture chamber.

Their little friend was well taken care of, and so the Three went back to their games. They played, but they did not seem as gay as before. The thought of that sad little face was troubling them.

Shortly after, the sweep came down into the

garden. He was clean and neat, and his eyes were shining with happiness. He was invited to play, and he joined the three children, who made him forget that he was a hard-working boy. But only for a little while, for it became late and he had to go.

“I wish I could do something to thank you all for being so good to me,” he said as he was ready to leave.

“Tell us a story — where you have come from,” coaxed Bianca.

“Would you really like to hear the story of a poor sweep like me?”

“Yes, yes indeed,” and the children settled themselves on the grass to listen.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHIMNEY SWEEP'S STORY

MY name is Pietro," began the soft, sweet voice, "and I am ten years old. I have been working since I was eight, and those first eight years I spent in the mountains of Savoy, where I was born.

"Perhaps you have never heard of the mountains of Savoy. They are far away in a country called France, and I have not seen them for a long time; yet I often think of them and wish for them, too. They are so high they almost touch the clouds. Their tops can be seen only on very clear days, and they are always covered with snow and ice. They are so beautiful! I have often watched them from the doorstep of our cottage and wondered if the Heaven that mother told us of was up there. In the evening, just before the sun went to sleep, they dressed themselves up in the loveliest of colors. From white they became pink or gold, then purple, then dark like the night. That was the time for us to go to bed.

"We lived in a little cottage at the foot of a tall mountain, in a pretty valley that was full



*Perhaps you have never heard of the
mountains of Savoy*

of sunshine and flowers. There were eight of us — my father, my mother, and six children.”

“What were their names?” asked Bianca, who thought she had kept still long enough.

“Keep quiet and listen,” said Paolo, in a disgusted tone.

“There were eight of us,” little Pietro again began. “We had little money, and father had to work hard to give us all enough to eat. Early every morning he went up the mountain to cut down the big pine trees. These were afterward sent to the cities to be made into masts for ships. So father used to tell.

“Mother too worked hard. We had two goats and many geese and chickens, and they



We lived in a little cottage at the foot of a tall mountain.

kept her busy. She had to milk the goats, make cheeses, and gather the eggs. She also made all our clothes — even spun the cloth for them — and cooked our dinners. So you see she could never be idle.

“Giovanni, my big brother, was then thirteen years old. Father called him his right-hand man. Whenever there was much work to be done up on the mountain, he always went with father.

“Giacomo was my second brother. He did not like to work as well as did Giovanni. He was twelve. He loved the mountains and went wandering on them for hours at a time. There were days when he went so far up that he would come home with his hands filled with the white *stella alpina*, or, as some people call it, the edelweiss.

“Maria, my sister, was ten, and a little mother to me and the two babies.

“The babies were Nina, four years old, and Beppo, two.

“We were happy for a long time, until the bad winter came. It grew so cold then. Snow fell all the time for months and months. The cottage was almost buried under it. Father could no longer go to work. There was so little to eat, that after a while we had only

potatoes and chestnuts, never any bread at all. And the chestnuts and potatoes were almost all gone before the spring came.

“Winter passed away at last, and the sun shone warm and bright again. The snows began to melt. We thought spring had come with its flowers and sunshine.

“But instead came the avalanche. You perhaps do not know what an avalanche is. We children of the mountains know it, and know it too well.

“The avalanche came one bright, sunny, warm day. That morning, father and some other men had gone up the mountain to work. They had gone up together, singing as they went. I still remember his voice singing. We stood at the foot of the path and waited for him to turn and wave goodbye to us. Then we scattered to our work.

“Suddenly we heard a dreadful sound. It came from the mountains, and it soon grew to a roar. We all knew what it was. Even I knew. Mother and sisters and brothers all came running.

“‘The avalanche!’ we whispered to each other.

“It was. The noise had become deafening. Every one around was crying and shrieking

and praying for the men up on the mountain. I was so frightened I just stood still and listened, for I could see nothing. The avalanche of snow and ice was rolling down on the other side of the cliffs. We were safe, but my father was working on that other side.

“And then just as the roaring and snapping and thundering seemed loudest, all was still and quiet again. The avalanche had passed.

“We all knelt on the snow to pray that father might be safe, but he wasn't. He never came back, though we waited and waited for him. Men went to look for him and for his friends. No one was ever found. The avalanche had taken everything away, men, huts, trees, even big rocks.

“Our house became very sad after that day. It had been so cheerful, but now we were too unhappy. Mother cried often, and to make matters worse the little money she had put away was soon gone. We were hungry, and she had nothing to give us to eat.

“One day Giovanni went away to the city to find work, and soon after Giacomo followed him. For a time we had enough money again. Then little Nina was taken sick and we spent all for doctor and medicines.

“Another winter was coming, and we could buy no food to store away. One day I told mother I wanted to go to work with Giovanni and Giacomo. She smiled and she cried and said:

“‘You work? Why, you are only a baby, little Pietro.’”

“It was hard to be called a baby when you knew you weren’t, but no matter what I said mother would not let me go.

“But a few weeks after that day I found work. A stranger came to the village, looking for little boys like me. He wanted them to go to the big city with him to clean the chimneys, which were too small for big boys to get into.

“I was standing at the door as he passed the cottage.

“‘Would you like to work for me, little boy?’ he asked.

“He seemed to be kind, so I told him my story. How father had been killed; how my two brothers had gone to work; how poor and hungry we were; and how I wanted to go to work to help my mother, but that she would not let me.

“‘Take me to your mother. We’ll ask her to let you come with me. Perhaps she will say yes.’”

“He begged and I begged. At first mother would not listen to him, but at last she said yes.

“‘Now run out and play,’ said the stranger to me. ‘Your mother and I must talk business.’

“When I went back, mother showed me a bag of money the stranger had given her. I thought he wanted to be kind to mother, who was so poor; and I know mother thought so, too. But that money was to pay for me. The stranger has never sent her any more, and that was two long years ago.

“I said goodbye to my home and my mountains and went. I wanted to cry, but I didn’t, for I was afraid mother might change her mind and not let me go away.

“The stranger and I walked for many hours. He was still kind to me and talked of many things, but I hardly heard him, for I was thinking of mother and Maria and the babies.

“We came to a town, and he hired a



*I was standing at the door
as he passed the cottage.*

horse and wagon. For a long time we drove along a wide mountain road.

“Early in the afternoon we came to a little house standing all alone near two shiny tracks. The tracks came out of a big, black hole in the mountain and ran into another hole.

“‘Here is the station,’ said my master.

“I wanted to know what the shiny tracks and what the big black holes in the mountain were.

“‘The tracks are for the trains to run over, and the holes in the mountain are tunnels. There are hundreds like them in the mountains of France and Italy.’

“‘But what are trains and tunnels?’ I asked.

“‘The mountains here are so high and steep, the trains cannot climb them; so men have dug holes to go through them. As for a train, you will soon see what that is.’

“He had hardly finished speaking when I heard a great rumbling and then a loud shriek. I clung to my master’s hand in fear that this might mean a new avalanche.

“And then something long and black came crawling out of the hole in the mountain and stopped just in front of us. It looked like a giant snake. Smoke and fire came out of its

head. I thought of the stories father used to tell us of giants and dragons, and I was really frightened.

“‘This is the train I told you of, my boy,’ said my master. ‘Come, get in.’

“But I tell you I did not like the looks of that train; I did not like the idea of getting into it, and I tried to run away.

“I only tried, though, for two rough hands seized me, threw me into a little room, and shut a door behind me. I found myself in a small room, with a long bench on either side. There were two little doors at each end, and a window at each of the four corners.

“I sat in a corner too much frightened to say even a word. With another shriek the train started. At first I could not get used to it, but after a while I liked it. It was fun to see the mountains flying by. It was only when we ran into a dark tunnel that I trembled



again. Soon it grew so dark and I was so tired and lonely that I fell asleep.

“A rough hand shook me awake. I was beginning to learn that my master was not so kind as he had seemed to be. I followed him out of the train and found that we had reached a big city, with lights everywhere and so much noise. Then we took another train and I slept again. The next morning we were in Salu.

“Here in Salu I have been ever since. It has been a horrid time. I have not seen or heard from any of my people in all these two years, and they don’t know where I am. Poor mother, how sad she must be! All I have done is work, work, work. Master is very strict. He is very cruel, and many a time he beats me. He gives me little or nothing to eat. I live in a dirty room, have dirty rags to sleep on and dirty rags to wear. As you see, it is hard for me to be clean or happy.

“But as soon as I grow a little bigger I am going to run away. I have some money that kind people have given me. It is hidden, and as soon as I have enough I am going back to my mountains and to mother.”

Pietro’s story was finished. Poor little Pietro,

a hard-working man, when he should have been at home playing with his brothers and sisters!

The Three said goodbye to their friend, and that night they told their father all about him. The next day the gardener was sent to Salu to look for Pietro and his master. They were not to be found. Master and boys had gone, but no one knew where.

“I hope that he will find his mother soon,” said the Three when they heard the news.



*Two rough hands
seized me...*

CHAPTER V

AN ITALIAN VINEYARD

“COME, children, it is time to get ready,”
C called Lisa, early one afternoon.

The Three knew why and hurried to obey. They were to spend the day at Padre Giovanni's farm, and that was something to make children happy indeed. Padre Giovanni was the man who had tried without success to make a gentleman of Tom. He was the tenant on one of the Nonno's vineyards. and the children were very fond of him.

The day was one in early October, the time for the grape harvest in northern Italy, a gay time for both children and grown folks.

In a few minutes Paolo and his sisters were dressed, ready to go. Tom followed them to the garden gate, fully expecting to be a member of the party.

“You have eaten too many of Padre Giovanni's chickens, Tom. You can't come with us,” Paolo said, and at home Tom had to stay. When the gate shut behind his little playmates,





*Padre Giovanni's
Farm*

he barked and howled in despair and loneliness. But the barks and the howls were of no avail. Padre Giovanni's farm was no place for a dog like him.

The road to the vineyard led through the hills of Salu, and a lovely road it was. It wound itself about green hillsides, thick with chestnut trees; it passed smiling meadows, crowded with cattle browsing peacefully in the late grass; it ran along sunny vineyards, rich with their wealth of ripe grapes. Far away in the distance the Alps showed, with white-capped tops hidden in the clouds. Above it all shone the bright sunlight in the clear blue of the Italian sky.

As the children walked along, busy harvesters stopped in their work to look at them. They were never too busy, those kindly peasants, to wave a hand or smile a greeting to children passing by, or even to offer a gift of ripe grapes.

"Here we are," called Clara at last, from her place as leader. The gray roof and the dull



brick walls of a house showed through the trees. The lowing of cattle, the barking of dogs, and the shrill cry of children were heard.

The Three were expected and were greeted in the hospitable way that never failed them, whenever they visited the vineyard. The children of the farm ran up to them, and even the dogs seemed glad to see them. Some of the children looked far from clean; they looked as if they had been playing with mud, yet how can a boy or girl keep clean while playing on a farm?

Padre Giovanni and his wife were a jolly old couple. Like all the peasants of northern Italy they were honest, hard-working folk who loved their home and their family above all else in the whole world. They had many children, so many that the Three could never remember their names. Some of them were grown up and married, with children of their own, but they still lived at the vineyard and helped the father with their work.

Padre Giovanni was the chief of his household. He ruled it with kindness and love, and his children gave him love and kindness in return.

The farmhouse was a large brick building, a

homely old place, but clean and well taken care of. A large, square courtyard opened out in front of it, spotlessly clean always. No wonder! Each morning it was swept with long brooms made of slender vine-twigs tied together, just as if it were the floor of a house. Chickens, geese, pigeons, dogs, and cats felt quite at home in the big yard.

To the left of the house a path led to the chestnut and fig groves. The chestnuts were huge old trees, and the nuts they bore were those great golden-brown ones that roast so well and taste so good. American children know them as Italian chestnuts and like them as well as did the Three, no doubt. Paolo, Clara, and Bianca thought it was great sport to gather them as they lay thick among the fallen leaves, some of them still in their prickly nests, opened to show the rich treasures within.

The fig trees were not so large, though their fruit was even better. Boys and girls in America know figs only after they have been dried, packed into boxes, and sent to them from far-away lands. Italian children are luckier, for they may have the fun of climbing into a fig tree and, sitting there among the leaves with the sun peeking through, may nibble at a feast fit for kings.

Another path to the right of the house led to the chicken houses, the cattle barns, the rabbit dens, the pigeon coops, and the pigpens; the farm was very well populated.

The main path faced the house. It ran on and on, straight and narrow for about a mile, lined on both sides with row after row of grapevines, so close together that there was just room enough between them for a man to stand. All kinds of grapes were there, of all sizes and all colors.

The Three, as was their custom, started on a tour of inspection, with the little children of the farm as guides. They were taken to see a new family of pigeons that had just arrived. They fell in love with the soft, downy things, but Bianca remembered that on a former visit she had loved a baby chick so hard that she had squeezed its life out in her hands, and she was very careful how she handled the pigeons. She was al-



*Each morning it was
swept with long brooms
made of slender vine-
twigs tied together.*

most afraid to touch them or to see Clara hold one too close.

After the pigeons came the rabbits, the baby calves, and nine little kittens that had made their appearance just the day before. There were always new baby creatures to be found at Padre Giovanni's, no matter how often the Three went there.

In their wanderings the children found an interesting family — five little guinea-pigs just beginning to blink at the light. They were so tiny and looked so cunning that Paolo decided then and there to have one for his very own.

“May I take one home with me, Lisette, only one little one?” he begged. “We can keep him in the nursery and be kind to him. I know he will like it.”

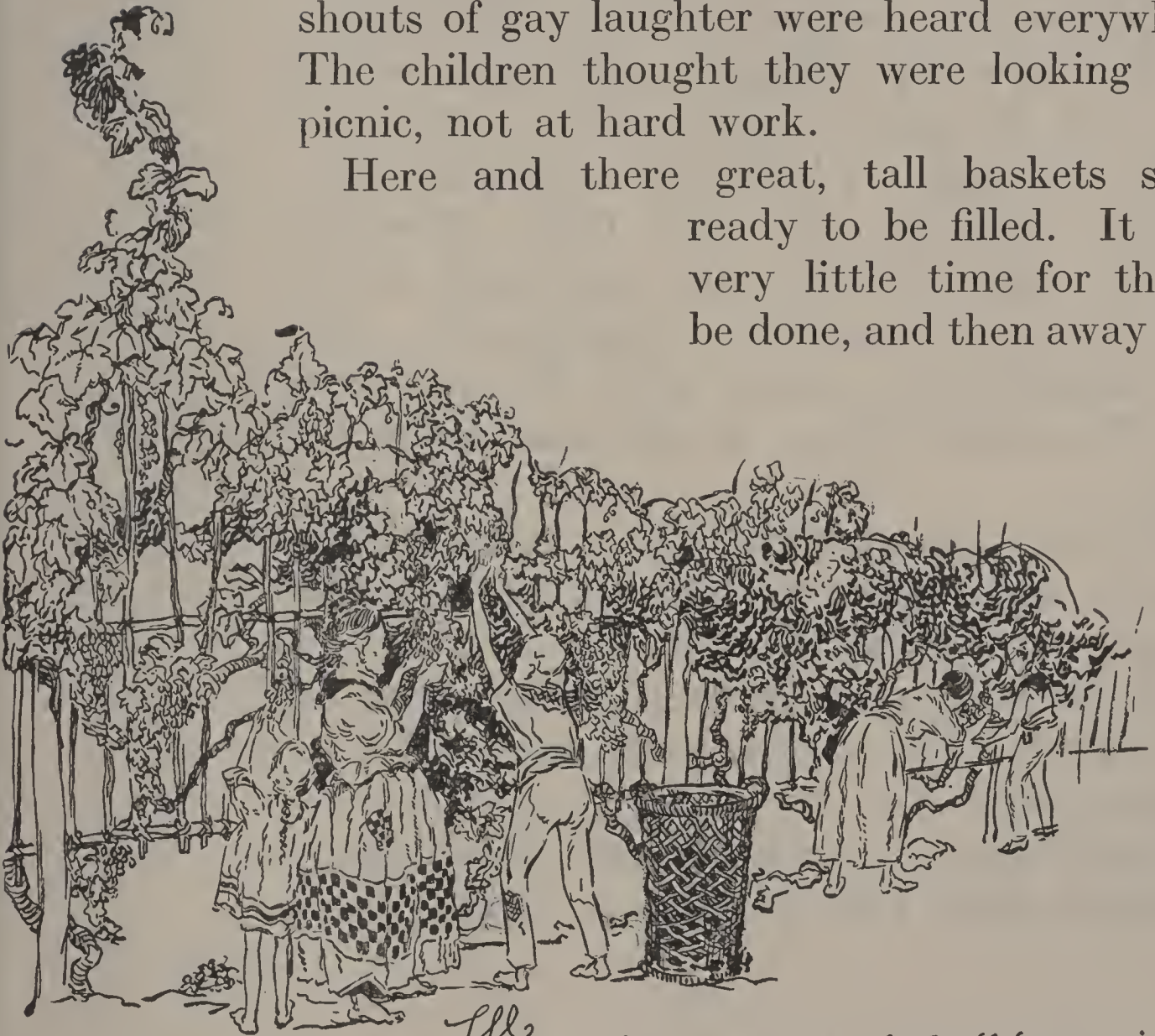
To Paolo's plea, Clara and Bianca added their own, but Lisa was not to be persuaded. Yet Paolo had a mind of his own, as we shall see later, though he wisely said no more.

When the farm creatures had all been visited, the Three wandered to the vineyards, to watch the peasants at their harvesting. What a lively picture they found, happy and busy indeed! Men and women, boys and girls, little children even, worked cheerfully together, for there

seemed to be much work to be done and no time to spare.

The brilliant colors of the men's bandannas and of the girls' kerchiefs, waists, and skirts stood out against the dark vine leaves, where among the shiny foliage gleamed the red, the yellow, the blue, and the black of the ripe grapes. The picture was beautiful; and to make it a happy one, snatches of songs and shouts of gay laughter were heard everywhere. The children thought they were looking at a picnic, not at hard work.

Here and there great, tall baskets stood ready to be filled. It took very little time for this to be done, and then away they



*When the farm creatures had all been visited,
the Three wandered to the vineyard.*

went, their place to be taken by others. The work had begun with the rising sun and was to go on till it sank to rest. In a few days the grapes would all be harvested and packed, ready to be sent to the cities that were waiting for them.

Paolo and his sisters watched till they grew tired. Then they ate grapes till Lisa frowned at them. They romped and they played; they even helped cut grapes that hung low enough for them to reach. The day came to an end at last, with the time to go home.

After all goodbys had been said, Paolo was suddenly missed. Lisa and Padre Giovanni went to look for him, but came back alone. The scamp was nowhere to be found. Lisa was beginning to worry, when the wanderer was discovered far up on the road that led home.

“He is a hungry boy, in a hurry to get home,” said Padre Giovanni, and no one thought any differently.

All the way home Paolo kept far ahead of the others. His sisters were too weary to wonder why.

At the garden gate they heard him calling, “Little mother, little mother, see what I have

brought you," and they ran to see what new mischief Paolo had been up to.

What did they find? Just a little brown and white guinea-pig, so little that its eyes were still shut tight. Paolo had carried it all the way home in his sailor blouse.

Clara and Bianca were delighted with their brother's cleverness, but not so their father and mother.

The little pig was sent home that very night to its mother, who must have been glad to see her baby again.

CHAPTER VI

NOVEMBER DAYS

NOVEMBER came, with its cold, damp, foggy weather. There is no sadder month in Italy than November. It is even called *il mese dei morti*, the month of the dead.

Day after day the sun kept hidden behind a heavy curtain of clouds; night after night the Three went to bed hoping that the next morning would bring with it sunshine and fair weather. But each morning their hopes would be broken.

Indeed, it was so cold and wet that they were not even allowed to play in the atrio. The nursery became their playground, and wonderful games soon became possible there. Each day the children thought out a new one, though the favorites remained hunting the wilds and acting fairy tales.

Little Red Riding Hood, Puss in Boots, Cenerentola,¹ all of them they knew and loved. At times it was hard for three actors to play the many parts of the story, and the aid of Lisa and Tom was often enlisted.

For many a day Little Red Riding Hood was

¹ Cinderella.

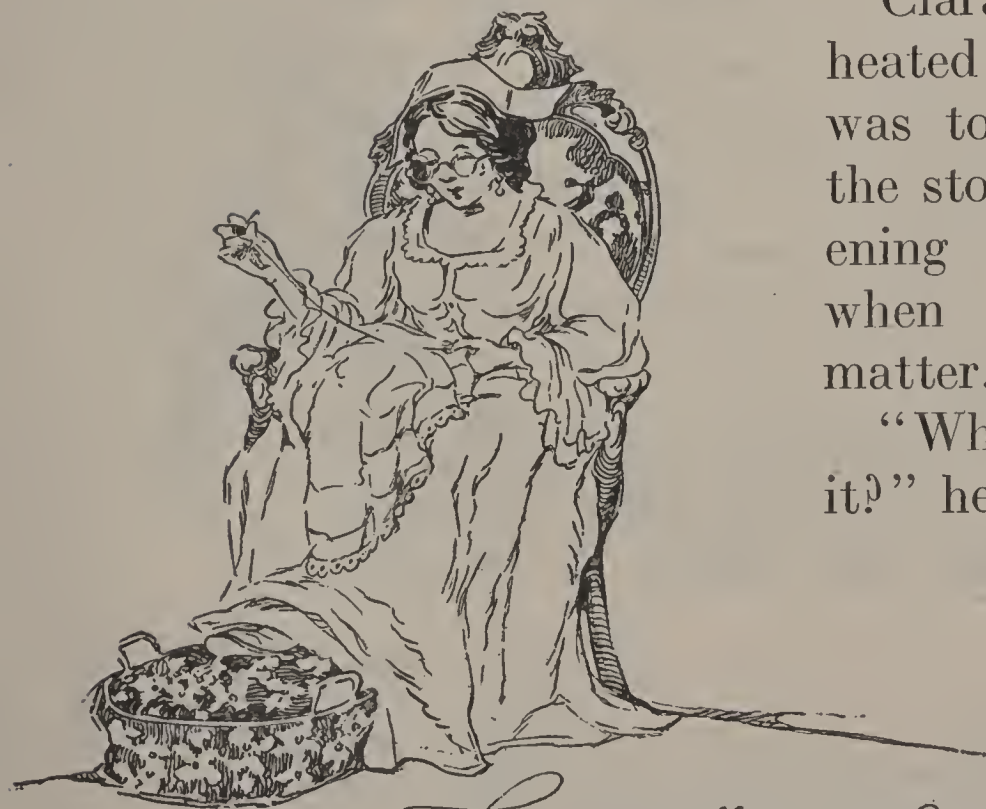
the popular story. The choosing of parts was not an easy task to work out, and several hot arguments followed before every one was satisfied.

Lisa was the grandmother, and she seemed to enjoy the game as much as her charges. As she sat at the big nursery window, with her knitting or her sewing, she patiently obeyed each word of advice given her as to speech and action.

Paolo was the hunter and stage-director-in-chief. He told his company what to do, and they tried to obey him faithfully. Once in a while there would be two or even three stage-directors, but that only made the game more interesting.

Clara and Bianca had a heated argument as to who was to be the heroine of the story. It was threatening to become serious, when Paolo settled the matter.

“Why don’t you both try it?” he suggested.



Lisa was the grandmother.

“But how?” asked precise Clara.

“Why, that’s easy,” Paolo answered. “We’ll have two Red Riding Hoods, one for you and one for Bianca. You can start the game, and Bianca can finish it.”

For a few moments the question seemed settled.

“Who will be the Wolf?” was the next problem.

“Tom! Let’s have Tom!” Clara’s eyes fairly popped out of her head in her excitement.

So Tom became an actor. The Three found it great fun to train him. And how patiently Tom tried to do as he was told! Up and down, back and forth, from one end of the nursery to the other he stalked, following every beck and call from his master and mistresses. One bit of acting he did object to strongly. It was hard to persuade him to lie on two chairs, with a towel wrapped around his head for a night-cap and one over him for a sheet. With this one exception, Tom shared full honors with the rest of the company.

“But the Wolf of the story talks, and Tom can’t.” Bianca made this amazing discovery and wondered what was going to be done about it.

"Of course Tom can't talk, *sorellina*," ¹ Paolo agreed. "One of us will have to do the talking for him."

"Can't I be the Wolf, then, with Tom, just to help him talk?" Bianca suggested hopefully.

"You talk like a Wolf? Your voice is big enough only for a mouse, Bianchina." And Paolo and Clara both laughed at Bianca's ambitions.

"Then Little Red Riding Hood belongs to me, and Clara can be the talking Wolf."

Thus it was settled, and the play proceeded with no further interruptions.

The Three enjoyed themselves in this way for a long time. Yet rainy days continued, and they grew tired of having to stay indoors. They felt like little prisoners, shut up in a cage. They missed the garden and the romps there in the sunshine. So their busy brains began to plan all kinds of mischief.

"Lisa, why do you stay around all the time? You really don't have to,

¹ Little sister.



Paolo was the hunter and stage-director-in-chief.

you know. We are big now, and if you would only let us, we should soon learn to take good care of ourselves.

This speech always made Lisa prick up her ears, for it was sure to mean some new trick. Yet once in a while the Three succeeded in evading her vigilant eye, and then they made up for lost time.

One day they played barber shop. Paolo was the barber, his sisters and Tom were the customers.

Clara was the first customer. She wore bangs, and they were easy to cut. In a twinkling a beautiful zigzag pattern stretched across Clara's forehead.

Tom was the next in line. His whiskers, most of his brows, and bunches of hair fell to the unmerciful scissors.

Bianca was then called to present herself. She had no bangs, only two heavy, long pigtails of which she was very proud.

"Let's cut one of them off, Bianchina," coaxed Paolo. "You have two,



Bianca as Red Riding Hood

anyway, and you really don't need them both, you know."

But Bianchina was not easily persuaded. And before further mischief had been done, Lisa came in and the pigtail was saved from a real danger, for in the long run Bianca might have relented for the sake of playing fair.

Another day the Three played a daring hold-up game. They had been hearing tales among the servants of the deeds of a man in the mountains near Salu, and they tried to see how near they could come to him in a make-believe.

They found an old bag in the garden house, and they hid it, waiting for a chance to use it. The chance soon came. It was decided to let Paolo and Clara be the robbers and Bianca and Tom the wanderers on the mountain.

"You are so little, Ninette, you will have to



Bianca was then called to present herself

be the one to get into the bag. Don't be afraid. We are not going to hurt you."

The game proceeded. Bianca was caught, put in the bag, tied and left on the floor — the road — for some one to find her and rescue her.

Lisa found her. What a funny look came into her face, when she opened the bag and found in it a very dirty Ninette, hot and almost without breath in her little body from her sad experience!

Lisa was beginning to lose patience with her charges, when something happened that brought peace for a few days.

The Three were playing a game of hide-and-go-seek. Paolo, wishing to hide in a place where Clara could not find him, climbed on the nursery window sill, clung to the shutter, and swung off into space. Bianca was so terrified that she grabbed the shutter and pulled with all her might. The shutter swung back and Paolo tumbled into the nursery, ready to give Bianca a good lecture for her interference. But he got up with an ugly cut on his head, and the pain of it made him forget the scolding.

The accident subdued everybody for a few

days, and Paolo, Clara, and Bianca became suddenly very good; but their father, knowing well that the good spell would last only as long as Paolo's head was bandaged, decided to get Paolo a governess who would keep him busy and out of mischief.

One evening, at dinner, the news was told.

"A teacher is coming for you tomorrow, Paolo," said his father.

"To teach me to read and write?"

"Yes, and also that it isn't safe for little boys to hang on window shutters."



Paolo was a happy youngster that night.

“Think of it, sorelline,” he said to his sisters, as they all lay in bed waiting for sleep to come, “soon I shall be able to read you all the fairy tales that have ever been written.”

Clara and Bianca were delighted with the news, and a little jealous too, that they had not been included in the great adventure. As they fell asleep, they made up their minds that they would ask their father to give to them too the teacher who was to show Paolo how to read all the fairy tales that had ever been written.

CHAPTER VII

MAESA COMES

THE next morning the new governess came. The Three were in the nursery when their mother brought her in to meet them.

“Children, this is Miss Louise, Paolo’s teacher,” she said.

The children looked at the young girl standing in the doorway, and they liked her with that first glance. She had such a bright face, and her great black eyes smiled so happily, that she won three young hearts even before they knew her. One after another, as they were

presented to the new teacher, the children shook hands with her.

“Will it be very long before I know how to read and write?” Paolo never waited too long to ask his first question.

“Not if you want to as much as that,” laughed Miss Louise.

“Let’s begin now, then, Maesa.”



Maestra is the correct Italian word for teacher, but *Maesa* was the best Paolo could do with the word, and so Miss Louise became Maesa from that moment.

“Come, Paolo,” said his mother, “father said you were to use the Big Room for your lessons.”

Clara and Bianca followed their brother to the Big Room. They had christened it Big, for it was the largest room they had ever seen. It was not a cheerful room, not as cheerful as the nursery. In those days, when children were told to study they were meant to work hard; so even the classrooms looked as if they meant business.

A long, wide table stood in the center. Many a fine romp had the Three had around it. Today it had books, pencils, paper, even ink on it. Nothing had been forgotten. Two chairs were drawn up to the table, a big one and a little one. Paolo’s eyes grew large with the wonder of his first lesson, when he saw all this array.

Not so Clara’s and Bianca’s. They stood by very glum indeed at having to give up their chief. They felt hurt at not being included in the new adventure, at not being allowed to join him in work as they always had joined him in play.

“Run away now, little girls,” said their mother, and they had to obey.

At the door they turned, and Clara thought she would give her brother a last piece of advice.

“Be good, *fratellino*,¹ and do your lessons well,” she said.

The nursery became very lonely without

¹ Little brother.



Two chairs were drawn up to the table, a big one and a little one.

Paolo. The games were not so happy, the fairy tales not so interesting. Tom also missed him. One evening Clara and Bianca asked their father to let them join Paolo, but he only laughed.

“Wait till you are as big as Paolo. You are much too little now. Go and play; there will be time for hard work later.”

The two little girls did not think so, however. After two weeks had passed, they grew tired of waiting, and finally they decided to take the matter into their own hands.

With a few *soldi*¹ they had saved they paid a visit to the gardener. He was an old man and loved his little mistresses very dearly. There was nothing he had ever refused them; they loved him, too, and they had known many happy hours in the garden house, where the old man kept all his tools and where he spent most of his time during the winter months.

As he saw Clara and Bianca come down the garden path, he went out to meet them.

¹ Pennies.



“Good morning, signorine, what can La Valle do for you this morning?” he called out, doffing the old brown cap he always wore. In all the years they knew him, the Three never saw him without that old brown cap.

“*Buon giorno*,¹ La Valle, we need your help very badly,” said Clara, with her most serious look in her deep-blue eyes. “Will you please go to Salu now and buy us two copy-books and some pencils like the ones Paolo showed you yesterday?”

“What do you want with them, you two babies?”

“Father won’t let Maesa teach us, so we are going to make her,” answered Clara, in her determined way.

La Valle laughed heartily, but he promised to obey.

“Now tell us of your country,” and the two perched on his knees, ready for the story they knew La Valle loved to tell.

“I come from Nice, in France, the City of Flowers,” he began. “Little ladies, when you grow to be big ladies, you must remember to go to Nice. It is just a bit of heaven as it lies there under the blue, blue skies of the

¹ Good morning.

sunny South, with the lovely blue Mediterranean at its feet. Such flowers everywhere! Daisies as big as my hands, and roses as big as my head. At night in the moonlight, the sea looks like a sea of gold, where the fairies and elves dance.”

La Valle loved to make things big, but his listeners did not know this and believed every word that fell from his lips. They listened spellbound and wished they were grown up, so that they could visit that wonderful Southland he spoke of.

At this point, Lisa came searching for her charges, as luncheon time was drawing near.

“Remember, La Valle,” they warned as they left him.

La Valle nodded wisely. That night, Clara and Bianca had the precious books and pencils.

The next morning Maesa had a big surprise. As Paolo was about to begin his work, two new pupils made their appearance and introduced themselves.

When their father and mother heard of the plan, they allowed it to go on — for a while, they said. From that day Maesa had three earnest pupils in her charge, and there is no doubt whatever that she had her hands full with them.

CHAPTER VIII

W I N T E R

MANY people think of Italy only as a land of sunshine and fair weather; yet there are cities and towns in Italy that have snowstorms, icy winds, and cold days, just as America has them. And the little Italian children are as happy to welcome the snow as American children are.

One morning in December Lisa woke up the Three with the news:

“The snow, children!”

In a jiffy they were at the window. Snow was falling, thick and fast. Everything was covered with a heavy white blanket. The garden, the trees, the bushes, all seemed to be cuddling in a soft, warm bed, ready for a long winter’s nap.

From the windows of the nursery the whole garden could be seen. Overnight it had been changed into an enchanted palace. Lisa called it the Snow Giant’s kingdom. A huge magnolia that stood in the center looked so tall with its burden of snow that she thought Snow Giant was a good name for it. The small trees round about it were the Snow

Giant's soldiers, and the snowflakes falling busily everywhere were the good fairies coming to put the giants to sleep, so that they would not harm any one.

The Three tumbled into their clothes, enjoyed a hearty breakfast, and paid their morning call to their mother's room. As there was still time before lessons for a romp in the garden, they were bundled up till they looked like round snowballs and were sent downstairs.

"Let's roll down the big staircase; we can't get hurt," suggested Paolo. But he was persuaded not to try the experiment, though he was probably right.

With one dash the Three flew outdoors, Tom at their heels. The snow lay so thick that they had to be satisfied to stay under the atrio. But Tom did not seem to care how thick the snow was, and out he bounded into the open. He acted as if he had lost his head completely. It was the first time he had seen snow, and he did not know what to think of it. He chased the snowflakes; he rolled round and round in the snow; he ran in and out of the trees and bushes, begging the Three to follow him. They threw snowballs at him. He barked at the snowballs and tried to catch them, looking

very much surprised when they disappeared in the snow and he could not find them.

Just as the fun was at its highest, the children saw Maesa coming for them. She meant work, and they did not feel a bit like work that day.

“A holiday, Maesa, a holiday today,” they called out to her. “Come and play; no work today,” they sang.

“No, children; you have been playing a long while and you will have the whole afternoon to enjoy the snow. A little work will be good for you. Come, the time won’t be long.”

When Maesa spoke in that tone; the Three knew she meant business, and they followed her meekly into the house.

“You will have to tell us a story, though,” said Bianca.

“If you behave well and do your work well, you shall have the story as you have it every day. And as long as the time is so near Christmas, it shall be a Christmas tale.”

The promise of a story was enough to make three little imps do almost anything, and so they promised to work. Sad to relate, that day the promise was entirely forgotten.

In a few moments the children were settled



at the study table. Paolo was the best student; he had made rapid progress and was beginning to read and write. This will be a surprise to American boys and girls, who have to study a long time before they can read books. The secret is that Italian is a very simple language and little children learn so quickly to read it, that in a few short weeks they can read almost any simple short story.

Clara and Bianca were still at the baby stage of drawing lines and reading a, b, c. Maesa was really only trying to keep them quiet while their brother studied. Yet they felt very important and enjoyed their work as much as Paolo did his.

As a rule the Three were attentive little pupils, but on that day, in spite of their promise, Maesa could not make them do anything. Their eyes kept wandering to the windows, where the snowflakes beckoned; their tongues kept wagging about the snow; their pencils scribbled and broke.

Luckily Maesa was a sensible teacher and the lesson was cut short.

“Now tell us the story you promised us,” Clara said with the bright, sweet smile that always worked wonders for her.

“And do you think you deserve it?”

“No, but you are going to forgive us to-day, for it is snowing.”

Maesa could not resist that argument; so the four friends settled themselves at the big study-room window, a window that was like a glass door. It opened out on a balcony, and from it the Three could see a pretty picture of the garden and the snow.

Miss Louise sat in a big chair. The Three made themselves cozy on three footstools at her feet. Eyes opened wide, still as mice, they listened.

A Christmas Legend

Every Christmas night, the Christ Child visits the homes of all the children of the world. To those who have been good He brings toys and candies; to the naughty ones He brings only bits of coal and sawdust.

One Christmas night, long, long ago, just as the clock began to strike midnight, the Christ Child started on His rounds. The trip from His heavenly home to the earth was accomplished in a few minutes. When He reached the earth, a big storm was raging. The night was a bitter cold one; snow was falling, and the wind blew in icy blasts.

The Little Child, as He flew along on His errand of love, became chilled through and through and oh, so tired! He was beginning to fear He could not finish His work, when He spied a tiny light glimmering in the darkness below Him.

He flew to it and saw that it came from the window of the tiny hut of a peasant.

“Perhaps the good people living there will give me shelter for a short while,” He thought as He went.

“Who is it?” called a gruff voice from within in answer to a timid knock.

“A little child begging for rest.”

“Go away,” called out the voice again, “I am in great trouble; I can’t open to any one tonight.”

“I am weary and cold and hungry. The night is stormy, and there is no other place for me to go. A shelter for the night, I beg of you.”

A shuffling of feet was heard. Then the door of the hut was flung open by an old man, ragged and unkempt.

“What do you mean — ” he began, but the words died on his lips. The beauty of the Child had dazzled him, and he could say no more.

“You poor little fellow; come in and warm yourself,” he said finally, when he regained his speech. “Sit down before the fire, and I will bring you a cup of sweet milk.”

The Child drank the milk gratefully. Then the old man showed him a bundle of hay in a corner of the room.

“Sleep there, Little Child; it is the best I can give you, but I give it gladly.”

“Thank you, good man.” And the Little Child lay down on the hay and fell asleep.

He did not sleep very long, however. He knew that the little children of the world were all waiting for Him. There was no time to be lost.

After a short rest the Child rose. He looked around for the old man, and saw him sitting at a table in the middle of the room. His arms were folded on the table, his face hidden on his arms.

The Christ Child could not bear to see any one unhappy; so He went up to him and asked:

“What is it, good man? Are you in trouble?” As He spoke, He patted the heaving shoulders with a hand like a tiny rose leaf.



The little Child...spied a tiny light below...

“Oh, trouble enough, Little Child! I am in great need. Last summer my crops were destroyed by a storm; nothing was left. And now I have not a cent with which to pay my landlord, not a grain to sell. Yesterday my landlord threatened to turn me out if I did not pay him. It is cold winter outside. Where shall I go?”

The Christ Child thought how kind the old man had been to Him.

“You sheltered me when I was cold and hungry tonight,” He said. “Cheer up! A kind deed is always rewarded.”

Before the old man could stop Him, He had taken the lantern from the table and was holding it to a stack of straw.

Wonder of wonders! Instead of catching fire, the straw became thick with wheat kernels. They grew larger and larger, heavier and heavier; then a golden rain pitter-pattered on the floor of the cottage. Soon the old man had more wheat than he had ever seen in his whole life.

“But who are you?” he asked in great surprise.

“I am the Christ Child and this is Christmas night. Long have I tarried here. Goodby,

for I must hurry. The children of the world are waiting for me.”

Before the old man could recover from his surprise, the Child had disappeared.

From that day the old man knew cold and hunger no longer. The Christ Child had been a welcome guest, and He had left His blessings behind Him.

CHAPTER IX

THE MARIONETTE THEATER

THE marionettes had come to town. For weeks the Three had been hearing that they were to pay Salu a visit. In the streets, moreover, announcements of the great event had been seen.

—O— GIANDUIA THEATER —O—

—O—

—DECEMBER 16 TO 20—

THE WONDER OF THE AGE
MARIONETTES TO THE KING

GIANDUIA

PULCHINELLA

ARLECCHINO

ETC., ETC., ETC.

ONE AND ALL

CHILDREN COME

BRING FATHER AND MOTHER

UNCLE AND AUNT

GOOD CHILDREN FREE

—O—

This sign was what made every little boy and girl in Salu just wriggle with delight. The coming of the marionettes was awaited

they thought their parents the most wonderful father and mother in the world.

“How lovely you are today, Mammina,” said Paolo. “May I walk with you?”

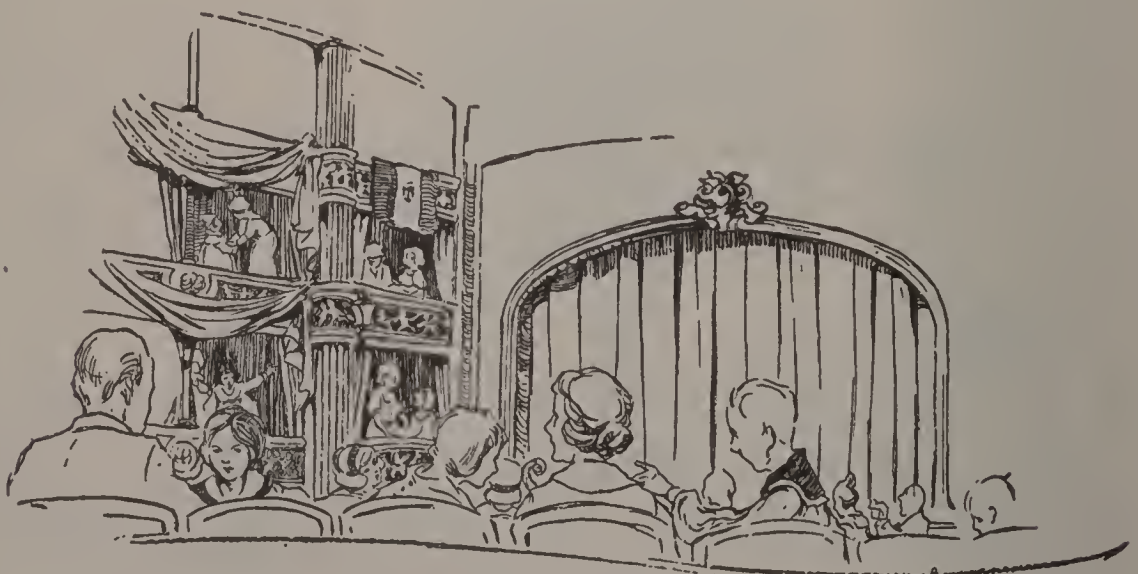
Paolo was a great admirer of his Mammina.

“I wonder why it is that we were given the sweetest and dearest little mother in the whole world,” he said to Bianca one day. “I have looked at the mothers of all the other children, and not one is as sweet as ours.”

“And father too.” Bianca had agreed with her brother, but she had been unable to solve the problem.

Clara joined Paolo as her mother’s escort. Bianca, of course, went with her father. The two were great friends and loved each other so devotedly that it was hard work to separate them.

The theater was gay with the colors of



*The theatre was gay with
the colors of Italy.*

Italy, the red, the white, and the green that the Three loved so well. It was full of gleeful, laughing children and their parents.

As the children entered the theater, a little boy with a bright silver medal pinned on his chest was allowed to go in without buying a ticket. He had been a good boy in school, so how could he be asked to pay?

Everywhere about, cheerful faces smiled, merry chatter sounded, and bursts of happy laughter broke forth unrestrained. All around, mothers tried their best to get coats unbuttoned, caps off, and wriggling little people settled in their places.

“Mamma, look, look! There is Emilia; and Peppino; and Teresa and Giulio!” It was not easy for Mamma to see and bow to all the friends the Three’s sharp eyes discovered.

Few American children know what marionettes are. Of course they all know what a Punch and Judy show is, but marionettes, as they are known in Italy, are really much better than a Punch and Judy show.

To begin with, the theater is a real theater, not just a little one three feet by four. The stage is a real stage, and the marionettes are

big dolls that look like ordinary people, for they walk, talk, sing, laugh, run, play, and dance, as live folks do.

Strings are tied to each big doll's feet, head, hands, even fingers, and these strings are so fine that no one from the audience can see them. A man or a woman from the balcony above the stage pulls the strings — one, two, or more at once — and the doll does just what its master wants it to do. The voice too comes from the man or woman above; yet it sounds as if it came from the marionette itself.

After a long wait, the performance began. The orchestra played the "Royal March," the "Star-Spangled Banner" of Italy, and every one stood up till the end.

Before the play started, the actors were introduced. Gianduia came first. A wild hand-clapping followed his appearance.

"Gianduia! Gianduia!" The cries were heard all over the house, and children even stood up on their seats to wave an excited welcome to him. Gianduia happens to be the buffoon, the funny man of Piedmont. (Piedmont is a part of Italy, just as New York State is a part of the United States. Salu is a town of Piedmont.) The children knew and

loved Gianduia and were greeting their favorite with shouts of welcome.

Gianduia doffed his three-cornered hat and sang a funny song.

After Gianduia came Pulchinella, the Neapolitan, with his two humps, one in front, one behind. Then came the Venetian, Pantalone, in his baggy trousers; then Arlecchino from Bologna, he of the many-colored suit. A great array of kings and queens, princes and princesses, fairies and elves followed. Also there was a tiny marionette-doll who walked across the stage on a tight-rope; a donkey who talked and wagged his ears when his master told him jokes; and finally, a dog who danced a jig.

The first act was announced as follows:

—O— A C O N T E S T —O—
W H O I S T H E G R E A T E S T B U F F O O N
I N
T H E W O R L D
?
—O—

Each marionette tried his best to outdo the others in the feats it performed, and so win the coveted honor. They walked on their hands, they danced on their toes, they jigged,

they turned somersaults. There was nothing they did not try to do. Pulchinella at last won the championship by turning round and round on his two humps like a spinning top.

The next act was the story of Guerin Meschino, one of the many heroes of legends of Italy. He passed through many adventures and through numberless battles with Saracens and Turks — people with whom Italy has fought wars in ages gone by. In all the battles, in all his encounters, Guerin Meschino came out with colors flying and was in the end given the hand of the King's daughter in marriage.

Amid great applause the performance ended. Happily tired, the Three went home with heads buzzing with new plans for games and tricks.

“Father, you must buy us a marionette theater, little enough for the nursery,” Paolo informed his father as they were walking home.

“They cost a lot of money, Paolo; why not ask the Christ Child for it when He comes next week?”

That seemed a fine idea, and on Christmas Eve the Three did as their father had told them.

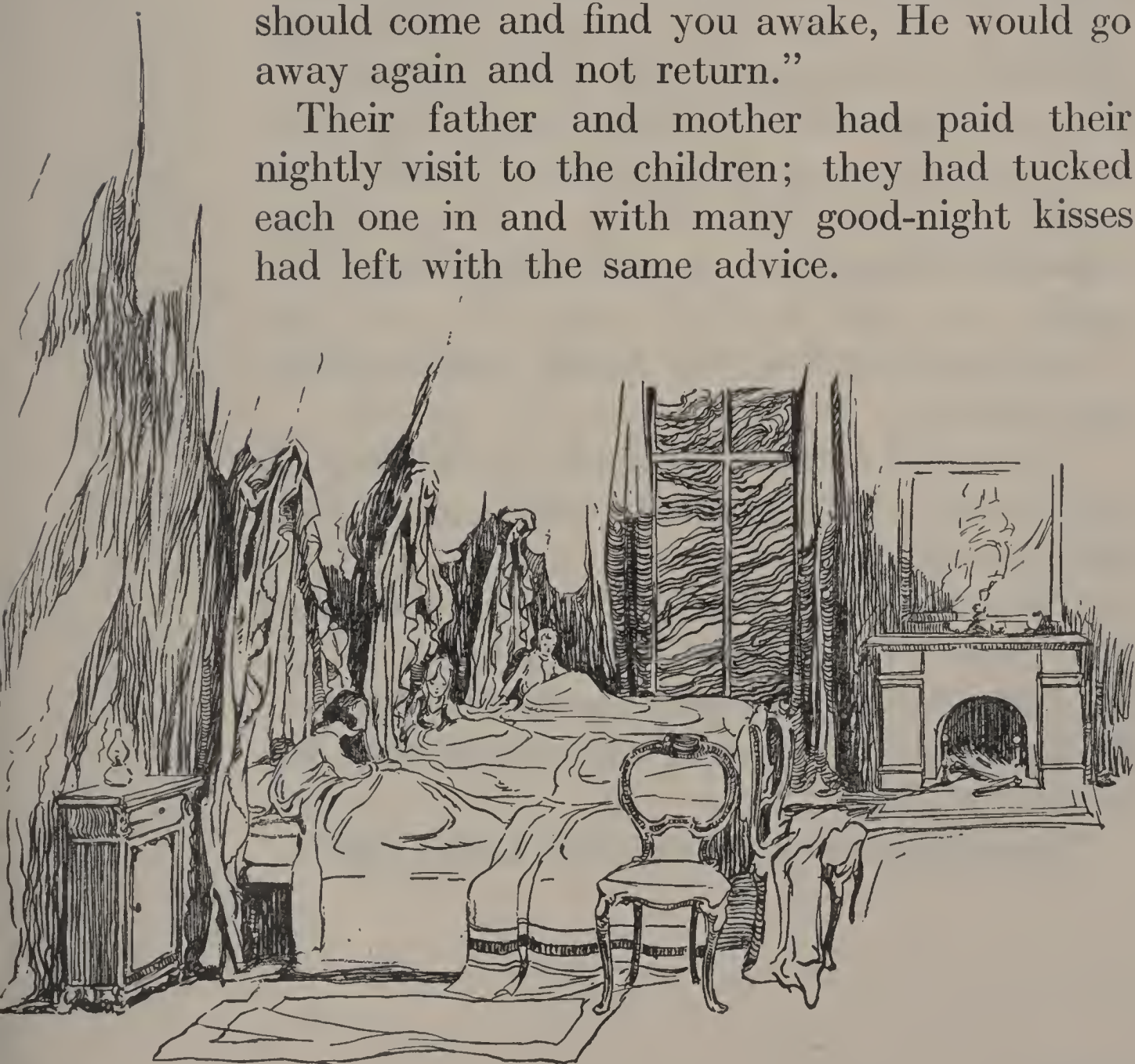
CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS

ON Christmas Eve the Three went to bed in great excitement. For a long time their eyes refused to close. Lisa had seen them safely in bed; then she had gone, with the advice to sleep.

“For,” she had warned, “if the Bambino should come and find you awake, He would go away again and not return.”

Their father and mother had paid their nightly visit to the children; they had tucked each one in and with many good-night kisses had left with the same advice.



“*Buon Natale, Buon Natale,*” the Three had called after them to wish them a Merry Christmas.

All the warnings had fallen on deaf ears. The Three simply would not go to sleep.

The firelight glow from the dying embers threw strange shadows on the walls of the nursery. The flickering light from the night lamp in the corner seemed alive as it danced fitfully in the wind that came from the open windows. The moon and stars peeked in from a clear, cold Christmas sky. The trees in their white snow garments were decked and waiting for the Christ Child to come. From downstairs, sounds of sweet music floated upward.

“Father is playing fairy music on his violin,” said Bianca.

“Let’s talk,” suggested Paolo. “Then we’ll keep awake and perhaps catch the Christ Child at His work.”

“Do you think we shall get all we asked for?” asked Bianca from her nook.

“And why not?” Paolo answered. “Didn’t Mammina say so? And she always tells the truth, you know.”

“Yes, Paolo, but we did ask for so much.”

Clara's conscience was troubling her as usual.

"That's nothing," insisted her brother. "The more we ask for the more we shall get. That's easy."

"Yes, fratellino, but don't you remember what Maesa said? That naughty children get only coal and sawdust? We have been bad so many, many times," Bianca broke in, in a timid little voice.

"How silly you are, sorelline. Haven't we said we were sorry, and doesn't that settle it? Hasn't father forgiven us again and again?"

That sounded like a very good argument, and for a few short minutes there was silence in the room. Then the chatter began again.

"Wonder how the Bambino rides down to earth?" asked Clara in a puzzled tone.

"In a golden coach, of course," Bianca piped in. "Neta said so, and she knows. She saw Him one Christmas night, long, long ago. She told me so herself."

"Maesa said He flies down to earth, and Maesa knows more than Neta," contradicted Paolo.

"How does He carry the toys, then?"

“He doesn’t have to, Bianchina. He would have too many to carry. Think of it! For all the children of the world! All He has to do is to say ‘Pirimpinpin!’ and the toys are there.”

“Pirimpinpin” was a word of magic powers, a favorite of the children’s fairy world. It was thought to possess marvelous gifts, to be an Open Sesame.

Little by little the chatter died down. No matter how hard the children tried, their eyelids grew heavier and heavier, till at last they dropped altogether and the Three were asleep. Another year went by, another chance was lost to see the Christ Child at His work.

Early the next morning, Bianca was the first to open her eyes. In a twinkling she was at the foot of her bed, the place where the Christ Child is known to leave His gifts.

“Paolo! Clara!” she cried out when she saw what lay before her.

She did not have to repeat the call. At that first cry two other white-clad figures became busy, too.

Cries of joy and shouts of happiness followed. The early morning hour and the fear of waking people up were not even thought of

as the Three tumbled out of bed and joined forces on the floor.

Everything they had asked for was there. The big dolls and the trunks full of doll-clothes for Clara and Bianca, the soldiers for Paolo; a drum, a ship, books, balls, pencils, games — what not?

Best of all, there was a great box which, when opened, revealed to three pairs of delighted eyes a tiny theater and tiny marionettes, the same as those seen at the theater the week before, only these were much, much smaller. Gianduia was there, Pulchinella, Arlecchino, the King with a crown on his head, his wife the Queen, fairies with gauzy skirts, a giant of course, and last but not least a few dogs and a couple of cats.

“The Grand Opening of the Greatest Marionette Show on Earth!” Paolo was shouting, when the door opened and his father and mother appeared, followed by Lisa, who was carrying wood for the fire.

“Well, *piccoli*,¹ did the Christ Child leave anything for you?”

The racket that greeted this question can better be imagined than told about.

¹ Little ones.

"One at a time, one at a time, please, bambini," begged their mother.

It was like begging the wind. The children forgot their manners, they forgot everything but the joy of Christmas morning.

"Will you get dressed now?"

Laughingly the Three started to obey, but there was so much to see, so much to do, that



After breakfast, they joined their father and mother and went with them to the Cathedral.

it was a long time before they were dressed and downstairs for their breakfast.

After breakfast, they joined their father and mother and went with them to the Cathedral. Salu has a beautiful old cathedral, built many centuries ago. The Three were awed into quiet by its size, its lovely colored windows, its dim corners, its high arches.

In the afternoon, Christmas dinner over, the Three gave a surprise party. Their father and mother had always taught them to think of those less fortunate than themselves. They had asked for permission to invite the little children on Padre Giovanni's farm to be their guests at the villa, and the permission had been gladly given.

The children came, dressed in their best clothes, with beaming faces and shining eyes. They looked like little men and women, the boys with long trousers, the girls, even the littlest ones, with long skirts and with bright silk kerchiefs tied under their chins.

At first they were very quiet and shy. They would not open their mouths and seemed scared to death. But as the minutes passed and cream, cakes, and caramels made their appearance, the fright went and the Big Room

held only gay, happy children having a good time.

Before going home each received a gift that the Christ Child had left for them. With eyes shining with joy they clasped dolls and drums and soldiers close, as they poured out thanks to the Signora who had been so kind to them.

They started for home singing cheerful songs. Their gay voices floated back to the villa and made three happy youngsters happier as they heard them.

CHAPTER XI

THE BEFANA

THE Befana! What a strange word! But it is not strange to Italian children. To them it is as well known as Santa Claus is to American children.

The Christmas holiday season in Italy lasts two weeks. It begins on the day the Christ Child was born and ends on the sixth of January, the day on which the Three Wise Men from the East came to do homage to the little King in the manger at Bethlehem.

The Epiphany, or day of the Three Wise Men, is a great holiday for the Italian little ones. The Three loved it almost as well as they did Christmas. They called it the day of the Befana.

The day is celebrated in much the same way that Hallowe'en is in America. The same games are played, the same parties are given, as on the night of the witches.

The Nonni had invited the Three to spend the afternoon at their home, to be guests at a children's party. Lisa dressed up her charges, Clara and Bianca in white, Paolo in a red sailor suit that made him look like a little prince, she said.

The great dining room was bright and cheerful when the Nonna led her guests in to the feast. And so many children! Of all the friends of the Three, none had been forgotten. Every one was there, with happy face and chattering tongue.

Paolo and his sisters were the guests of honor. Paolo sat at the head of the table and looked very tiny indeed, half swallowed up in the Nonno's big chair. A huge painting of the Nonno's father hung behind him and made him look even tinier.

The big table shone with old silver, gleaming china, and sparkling crystal. Flowers turned it into a garden, and the gay child-faces around were sweeter than the blossoms, the Nonna thought.

What the children liked best of all were the round *tortas* ¹ waiting on the table, seeming to say, "Please eat us."

No child needed the invitation. The *tortas* tasted good, and oh, how many surprises they held! Gold rings for the brides, thimbles for those who were to be poor, money for the lucky ones, and what not?

In a very short time, cakes and cream and

¹ Cakes.

sweets disappeared, and the youngsters trooped into the large atrio. There they found a magic-lantern show waiting for them. After that, to end up the day, all gathered around the Nonno and begged for the story of the Befana. He needed no coaxing, but began at once.

The Story of the Befana

There is an old, old story that tells of six lovely fairies, who were just alike, alike as six peas in a pod. They had the same hair of spun gold, the same eyes of velvety black, the same rose-leaf skin the same teeth of pearls. These beautiful fairies lived in a wonderful home in the Land of Fancy. They loved little children so much that they were always wishing to do something for them.

One day a great gift came to them, suddenly, they knew not how. Perhaps it was the Christ Child who had blessed them with it, for He too loved little ones well.

The gift? That any child the fairies thought of, or saw, asleep or awake on the day before that of the Three Wise Men, might, on awakening the next day, find all it had wished for.

Not long did the six fairies, as alike as six peas in a pod, wait to use their great powers.

Everywhere, as swift as the wind, they traveled.

One morning all the children of the world woke from happy dreams to find their homes turned into Toyland. Dolls, toys, tin soldiers, games, nuts and sweets, everything they had wished for, were there waiting for them.

Who had worked the wonder? Father? Mother? They said no, and they were known to tell the truth. Try as they might, the children could never find out who the kind beings were that remembered them every year.

Many hundreds of years went by. On the same night of each year, the very same thing happened. The children of the world had one surprise after another.

But, alas! The fairies, strange to say, with all the traveling they had to do, became at last very, very tired. Little by little they became old. One sad day they could no longer move from their wonderful home in the Land of Fancy.

They still loved little children dearly, however; so every day saw them at the windows of their palace, looking through powerful glasses — telescopes they called them — to see if they could find any one who might take their place.



One fine day they discovered the
person they were seeking. It was a little
old woman who lived all by herself in
a tiny cottage at the edge of the world.

One fine day they discovered the person they were seeking. It was a little old woman, a dear little old woman, who lived all by herself in a tiny cottage at the edge of the world.

The name of the little old woman was Befana. She had had another name too, but she had lived so long that she had lost it. And as she was half blind, she had never been able to find it again.

As soon as the six fairies saw her, they knew they had found the very one they wanted. Old Befana was still as spry as a young girl, in spite of her age. Though she could not see very well, that really did not matter much, for children were not hard to find. Moreover, the little old woman loved all little children, the children of the rich as well as the children of the poor, the children of the King as well as the children of the beggar.

In a dream, the spirit of the six fairies went to Befana. She heard fairy voices talking and telling her of the marvelous gifts she was to possess.

That very year Befana took up her work. And every year since then the children of Italy, and of other countries as well, have waited for her on the sixth day of January.

The children of Italy are lucky indeed, for they have two gift days, one almost on top of the other. It is a fine thing to have. For if the Christ Child happens to forget anything, the Befana is sure to remember it. Or if a child has been so naughty that the Christ Child has left nothing for him, he has plenty of chance, in two weeks, to show that he knows how to behave himself, if he wants to.

CHAPTER XII

A TRIP TO TORO AND THE CARNIVAL

TORO was a town near Salu. In it lived the Three's favorite uncle and aunt and two little cousins, Letizia and Alberto.

One evening in February the Three were given a bit of pleasant news.

“Bambini, you have been so good and worked so hard with your books, that your mother and I are going to take you to Toro with us next Saturday. Want to come?”

The question was asked in a very quiet voice, but the answer given was far from a quiet one. The Three showed clearly by their actions that going to Toro was something to be more than happy about. And no wonder! Not only would they find there uncle and aunt and cousins, but the Carnival of Toro was to begin the following Monday.

There were still two days to be lived through before the eventful Saturday. The Three had never known such long days. Every one in the house was told of the trip. Lisa came first; then Maesa, Toinette, Marie, La Valle, and even Tom, who did not seem to understand what all the fuss was about.



The day came at last. A bright, sunny day it was, soft and mild, full of the promise of the early Italian springtime.

The Three were awakened at dawn, for an early train had to be taken at Salu. How important they felt at being awakened at that early hour, when the whole world was still asleep!

As Lisa and her three charges started out, the streets were just beginning to wake up. They seemed to belong only to the birds, singing their greetings to the rising sun. The children kept them company by chattering away as gayly as they.

Peasants going to market passed now and again and smiled and bowed, as they called:

“Buon giorno, signorini! Buon viaggio e buona fortuna.”

By this they meant:

“Good morning, little children! A fine trip and good luck to you.”

Lisa had no trouble in keeping the Three together that morning. They seemed in a great hurry and in constant fear that the train might go without them.

“Are we on time? Is it late yet? Will father and mother come in time?”

These and many other questions were being shot at Lisa, who answered them all, or at least tried her best to. Poor Lisa! The good God must surely have meant her to take care of little ones, He blessed her with so much patience.

When at last the station was reached and every one was settled, she breathed a sigh of relief.

The trip to Toro was but a short one, and the Three had no time to get tired. Indeed, they enjoyed every moment of it.

As the train dashed along on its way, the view from the little windows was lovely enough to make even children remember it.

Fields and valleys, one after another, passed before them. Some were still sleeping their winter sleep; others were beginning to smile under the warm rays of the sun. Neat white farmhouses, with pretty bright-tiled roofs, flew by. Trees all in a row — oh, so many of them! — made the children think of the soldiers they had seen pass in review before the King on the parade grounds. Rows upon rows of hills seemed to beckon to them from the distance, and far, far away, lofty mountain tops glinted in the sun.

The train made many stops on the way. The towns and hamlets looked very old and quaint, as they lay peacefully basking in the sunshine. Many of them, almost all of them, had one old castle at least, overlooking the town from a hillside. In these old castles had lived the feudal lords of long ago.

Uncle Sandro and the two cousins were



*The towns and hamlets were
very old and quaint.*

awaiting their guests at the station of Toro. Uncle Sandro was an officer in the army. He looked very tall and handsome in his uniform. Letizia was a real little Italian beauty, with great, dark eyes and hair the color of midnight. Alberto, on the contrary, was fair like his mother.

To see them and to fly to their arms took only a moment. The Three were very fond of their uncle, for he still knew how to play just like a boy, and never seemed to be grown up at all.

Greetings over, Lisa and the children were packed into one carriage and sent on ahead.

Toro is a dainty little city, quite modern in spite of its age. Like Salu, it was built by the Romans. As it nestles in its circle of green hills, it looks very lovely indeed.

There was great excitement in Toro that day. The streets were gay with people and bright with bunting and decorations for the coming Carnival. . The large piazzas, or squares, were busy with workers. Grand stands and little stands, merry-go-rounds, barracks, and theaters of all sizes and shapes went up all around under the ceaseless beating of hammers.

The Three watched in great excitement and

almost fell head first out of the carriage half a dozen times.

“Lisa, you will take us to see everything — do you hear? — everything! We must not miss even one place,” Paolo declared, and Lisa promised to obey orders.

Aunt Clelia was smiling a welcome at the



gate of her garden when the carriage full of children arrived. She was treated to the same noisy welcome Uncle Sandro had received, but the greetings lasted but a moment, for the Three were dragged away by Letizia and Alberto, who were anxious to show the treasures of their nursery.

Two days followed, full of happy games and long walks through the country around Toro, with a great deal of talking about the wonderful times coming.

Monday dawned clear and warm, a perfect day for the great event that was to take place, the Children's Parade on the Corso.

Early in the afternoon each child was dressed in a masquerade costume. Paolo and Alberto looked gay and handsome, each in a page's suit of satin, with feathered caps set rakishly over a wig of curls, as they danced attendance on three proud little ladies, Clara, Letizia, and Bianchina, quaintly lovely in their long velvet gowns and tiny velvet caps.

Proud as lords, they all set off in a carriage full of blossoms and sweets and confetti.

The Corso Vittorio was in gala attire. Bunting of every hue made it look like a flower garden. Crowds in holiday attire lined each

side. Soldiers and carabinieri, the mounted police of Italy, rode up and down to keep the crowds from getting into the way of the passing carriages. And these were filled with children in the costumes of Gianduias, Harlequins, shepherds, knights and ladies, princes and buffoons, their hands full of flowers and sweets, which they threw to the crowd.

Not only the children of the carriages were in costume. In and out among the people in the streets flitted gay figures of boys and men, in bright silk and plumed hats. The children thought they looked just like the princes and the singers of their fairy world, who might have stepped out of the pages of fairy books to make them happy for a day.

Music, flowers, songs, and laughter were on every side; happiness was all around.



*The Corso Vittorio was
in gala attire.*

When the children returned home, the beloved costumes did not have to be put away. They were kept on throughout the day, for the dinner and for the evening festa, when the house was opened to many little friends and Uncle Sandro gave a marionette show.

"It is even better than the one we saw in Salu," Clara said.

"Of course; Uncle Sandro is giving it." Bianca found a quick answer to almost any problem.

After the performance Paolo, Clara, and many of their friends fell asleep, and they did not even remember who had put them to bed.

The next day was Mardi Gras, the last day of Carnival. *Mardi* is the French word for Tuesday, and Mardi Gras is the Tuesday which comes just before the first day of Lent. From early morning till the stroke of midnight, every one is gay and jolly. After Lent begins there is no more merry-making till Easter-day, and that is a long way off.

Lisa, as she had promised, set out early in the afternoon with her Three and their cousins, to take them to see everything, in accordance with Paolo's royal command. They found a great racket in the streets. The whole of Toro

had been turned into a circus. Laughter, fun, and merriment were the kings of the day, and those who liked it all best were the little ones.

The monkey theater was the first place visited. Trick monkeys performed for their guests and seemed to enjoy the shrieks of laughter they caused. Then came the wild animals, the acrobats, the tight-rope walkers across the Piazza Garibaldi; nothing was left out.

Tired out, they were tucked into bed that night by a no less tired-out Lisa.

“We have lived with the fairies, haven’t we, sorelline?” said Paolo sleepily. “Wouldn’t it be fun to do it all the time?”

“If I were a fairy, I’d like to be a real little girl, once in every little while, wouldn’t you, Bianca?” asked Clara, who thought life was very nice as it was.

But Bianca was already far into Dreamland, and she gave no answer.

CHAPTER XIII

SPRINGTIME IN THE LAND OF FLOWERS

A FEW weeks after the Three returned from Toro, spring in all its beauty made its appearance.

There is nothing else so lovely as the Italian springtime. At least, the Three thought so. There is loveliness everywhere. The hillsides are covered with trees in bloom, the woods are filled with blossoms of every hue, the soft breezes are sweet with perfume, the air rings with the song of birds and the laughter of children.

Each morning, as the Three wandered through the gardens, they found new joys, new surprises.



The Fig Tree

In the dark, cool, wet corners, in the hidden-away nooks, the drip, drip, drip of water told them that the bits of ice and snow they had seen there only a few days before were fast melting away under the warm rays of sunshine. They crept everywhere, those fairy sprites, and would not let even one bit of winter stay.

Fuzzy brown caterpillars, with bright red or yellow spots hidden in the brown, crawled along dark twigs, enjoying the soft spring air as much as the children who watched them. It was fun to see them crawling, crawling, swinging from one twig on to another.

The plants of the gardens shook themselves awake from their long winter's nap and dressed themselves up in the loveliest green of newborn leaves.

The first tree to put on its spring frock was the great magnolia in the center of the garden, the snow giant of winter days. In a few hours, it seemed, it became covered with hundreds of blossoms, white as wax. It looked as if it wanted to fill the garden with its beauty.

Then a peach tree budded into life. One morning the children found it pink with bloom. A sunset cloud had surely lost its way the

night before and become tangled in the branches.

Plum tree followed the peach.

“Are they running a race?” Clara asked La Valle one day.

“It seems so, *bimba*,”¹ he laughed.

And then the flowers began to smile their “good morning” when the children went each day to see how they were thriving.

By the middle of March the daily walks through the hills of Salu were begun once more. Sometimes Lisa went along, sometimes Maesa. Maesa had a delightful way of taking the Three for a walk and calling it a lesson. She told her pupils the name of every tree, blossom, and singing bird. She knew them all and loved them, as she loved the green fields and blue skies, and she made the Three love them as well.

Clara and Bianca never forgot to carry baskets with them on these walks. Empty though the baskets were when they started, they always returned them to their mother filled to the brim with sweet offerings. It was easy to work the miracle in the hills of Salu.

¹ Little girl.

Primulas, little yellow blossoms so called because they are the first to appear, gleamed gold among the grasses. Violets of every hue — white, yellow, pale blue to deepest purple — tried their best to hide under heavy green leaves, but bright eyes found them everywhere. Their fragrance, also, revealed the hiding places. And lilies-of-the-valley, tall and slender, lifted their dainty heads in the mossy green nooks that were crowded with them.

These were the favorites. But there were others not to be overlooked. Blue forget-me-nots blossomed by the brooks; pink and white *margheritine* dotted the fields and the meadows; and later poppies and cornflowers peeped out from the golden wheatfields.

Little by little, under the magic touch of the sunshine and with the loving care of the old gardener, the gardens at the Villa Grande grew and thrived till they were a mass of color and brightness.

Violets, pansies, forget-me-nots, verbenas, mignonette, tulips, lilies, roses, jasmine — all together they mingled until the red, white, blue, orange, and purple turned the flower beds into so many rainbows.

The work of La Valle, as he dug and planted

and grafted, fascinated the Three. They wanted a chance to dig and plant, also. With La Valle's promise of help they each became one day the proud owners of a plot of ground. The plot was not very large, it is true, but big enough for any kind of experiment.

La Valle initiated the children into the mysteries of things a-growing. They dug holes, sowed seeds, watered the plot faithfully each morning, and watched and waited, oh so long, for the first signs of life.

The reward came. One morning tender bits of green leaves appeared. What excitement those green leaves brought! How proud the three youngsters were of them! But the plants



Olives

grew so slowly, so very slowly! Paolo was more patient, but Clara and Bianca wanted to pull the little plants to make them grow faster.

“How do they stick in the ground so well?” Bianca asked La Valle one morning. “What holds them?”

“Well, you see, piccola, each little plant has roots like tiny feet that help it to stand up.”

“Roots? Feet? How many feet?”

“Many, many of them.”

“What do they look like?”

“Like hairs. Some of them are as fine as your own golden hair, little one.”

Roots that were like feet and feet that were like hairs seemed strange things to Bianca. She puzzled a long time about them and at last made up her mind that La Valle was just telling a funny story to keep a little girl quiet.

That night she told Lisa all about roots and feet, and what La Valle had said about them. Lisa laughed and said La Valle was right. Still



Bianca was not satisfied; so she decided to find out for herself.

Early the next morning, before Lisa came, she crept out of bed, dressed herself as best she could, and went down to the garden.

In a few minutes she was kneeling by the flower bed that belonged to her.

She took hold of a little plant and pulled; but alas, it broke. The next shared the same fate. Then she decided to dig around and around with her fingers. This time the plant came out safe and unhurt. The slender roots showed themselves, and Bianca found out what they were like.

“But they don’t look like feet and they are not golden,” she thought to herself. “La Valle told me a story.”

Then one after another the little plants all came out and were put aside. Not one of them had feet, not one had roots of gold.

Now Bianca tried with all her might to put them back into the ground again. But the task was too great for tiny fingers, and she was very near to tears at the havoc she had wrought, when La Valle appeared on the scene.

“What is my little Queen doing out so early this morning?” he asked.

Bianca told him what she had done and why. And also what she thought of people who did not tell the truth.

“Marie says that every story you tell keeps you out of heaven for one hundred years,” she finished.

La Valle did not laugh. He knew his tiny mistress would never have forgiven him if he had. Instead, he took the little girl on his knee and explained all about the roots, till she understood.

“Never touch them again, bimba, or they will die and never have the pretty flowers that will surely come if only you are patient,” he said.

Together, Bianca and La Valle put each plant back where it belonged.

“Now run back to bed, piccola,” La Valle said as they finished.

Bianca obeyed, and no one saw her slip into the nursery. A long time passed before any one knew of her morning adventure.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SOLDIERS AND THE ITALIAN FOURTH OF JULY

SPRINGTIME brought not only flowers, sunny days, and country walks; it brought also the soldiers, and as the Three were devoted little lovers of the army, they welcomed them as much as they did everything else.

A low stone wall ran along one side of the garden. If the children leaned over the wall, they could easily see what went on below. From it they had also a fine view of the barracks which had been built in the fall, but which had been empty all the winter.

Early in April the soldiers moved in. One morning Paolo, Clara, and Bianca heard a lot of talking. Commands were being given, orders shouted; horses' hoofs were beating a merry tattoo on the cobblestones below; wheels were clattering along.

The Three ran to the wall and looked over. The soldiers they had been waiting for so long had come at last. What a merry going and coming! It certainly was moving day.

"*Evviva i Bersaglieri!*"¹ Paolo shouted, and his two sisters joined him heartily.

¹ Hurrah for the Bersaglieri!

The small red service cap with the red tassel had told the children soon enough that the troops were the beloved Bersaglieri, one of the crack regiments of Italy.

The soldiers looked up and smiled. Then the Three recognized some of the officers and waved so excited a welcome that they almost toppled overboard as they did so. The officers seemed as glad, for they waved and smiled back at the three youngsters who looked so happy to have soldiers for neighbors.

The moving went on all day. Many, many soldiers went up the hill road, and with them went the patient army mule, dragging heavy carts full of barrack furniture — trundle-beds, tables, chairs, bags, boxes, supplies of all kinds.

In a couple of days the Bersaglieri were settled in their new home, and then the drilling of recruits began.

Italy has a law, under which every man has to serve in the army for two years at least. It seems a hard law, yet it has made a man out of many a Simple Simon. Moreover, every man in Italy, except the lazy ones, seems to think of his soldier days as among the happiest in his life. So it cannot be so bad, after all.

In the morning, at five o'clock, the bugle played the reveille, the wake-up song. For a few mornings the Three heard it, too, but after those few days they became used to it and went right on sleeping. Not very good soldiers, were they?

At eight o'clock each morning the drilling began. At times it took place in the barrack yard, at times in the road by the garden wall. Both places could be seen from the garden; so each morning found the Three watching at their post.

At the beginning of the new game Lisa watched with her charges, for fear they might fall over the wall. After a few days she was well satisfied to leave them in the care of big Tom, so big now that when he stood up on his hind feet he was bigger than any Bersagliere.

"Take good care of them, Tom," she would say.

Faithful Tom watched his little friends well indeed. It is true that he kept one eye on the soldiers, for he too liked to see them drill; but his other brown eye was on the children, and it could see a lot that was going on. As soon as one of



The Bersagliere

the Three leaned over too far, he would grab a bit of clothing in his teeth and give a good hard pull.

“Haven’t you better sense than that?” he seemed to say in his doggy way.

Now and again the Three would start to tease, just to see him get excited, poor fellow. They became so very bad at times that his barks of terror brought Lisa running, to see what the trouble was.

But to go back to the soldiers. How funny they were when they first began! Most of them were country boys, or boys from the mountains near Salu. They had faces as round as the moon and as pink as a baby’s. Their eyes were round, too, and many looked scared to death. Perhaps it was the first time they had been away from home, poor fellows.

In their new uniforms, most of which were too big or too small for the owners, they looked foolish and felt foolish.

After many an effort, the soldier-line looked pretty straight.

Then:

“Attention!” came the order, sharp and quick.

Not an eye moved, not a head. Some toes

turned in, instead of out, it is true, but how was a poor fellow to remember everything at once?

“Salute!” was the next order, and then the fun began.

The boys saluted, or at least they tried to. The task was far from easy, judging by results.

At the command, Gianni’s hand shot up to his head so fast that Gianni’s hat flew high in the air. But Gianni’s eyes never left his officer’s face.

Tonio’s hand went up to his nose and there waited for some one to come and push it farther.

Pietro’s hand covered his face like a curtain. Poor Pietro, he was indeed a funny sight. Try as he might, he just could not salute and keep his mouth shut at the same time.

Michele’s hand pointed to the blue sky above, and Giaco’s to the brown earth below.

To watch them was as jolly as going to a Pulchinella show. Once in a while the Three even forgot to be polite and laughed. But the officers did not laugh. Far from it. They talked, they begged, they stormed, they shouted. Again and again teacher and pupils

tried, till even the worst Tonio of all was perfect.

“Break ranks!” at last brought relief to every one.

The next day the lesson began once more, for most of the boys had forgotten it. They were just like a class of children in school.

Day after day the lessons went on, and the audience of three children and one dog was always present. So used to it did the officers become, that if any of the four were not on hand, a note would be sent later in the day to inquire for the missing one.

A few weeks passed, and the young fellows began to show signs of improvement. They looked brighter, happier, cleaner. They saluted in good form, they stood at attention still as pokers, they marched in time to the music, they trotted their Bersaglieri trot in perfect time.

“*Al passo, al trotto!*”¹ The commands were obeyed on the instant.

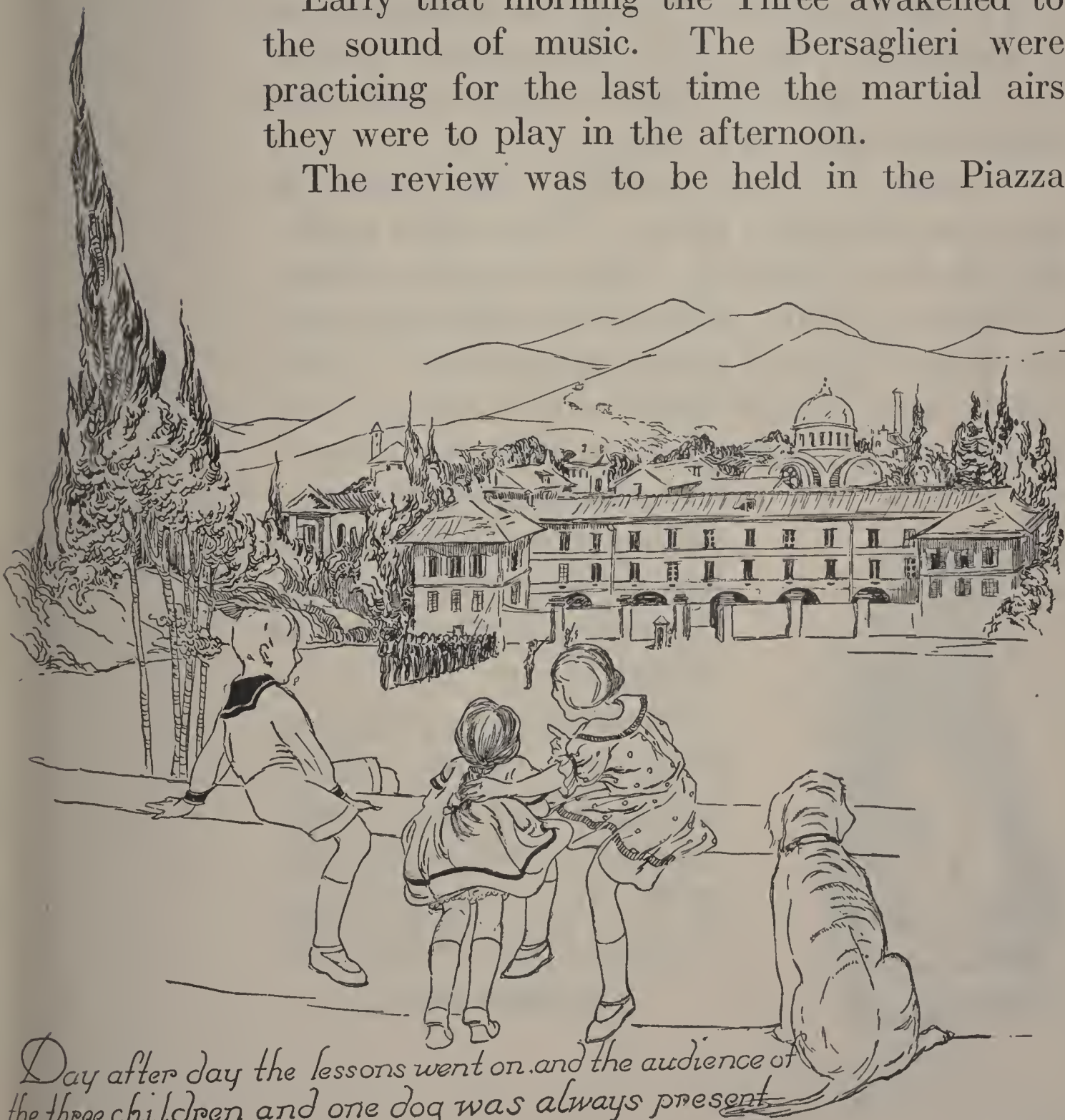
The last week of May brought great excitement to the barracks. Shoes, hats, and guns were polished till they shone; suits were brushed till not a spot remained. Everything took on a holiday look.

¹ Walk! Quickstep!

The first Sunday of June was the cause of the excitement. The day is the *Festa dello Statuto*, the celebration of the granting of the Italian Constitution — the Fourth of July of Italy, as it were.

Early that morning the Three awakened to the sound of music. The Bersaglieri were practicing for the last time the martial airs they were to play in the afternoon.

The review was to be held in the Piazza



Day after day the lessons went on and the audience of the three children and one dog was always present.

d'Armi, the Square of Arms. The Three, with Lisa, started out early to see it.

Salu was in gala attire that afternoon. Thousands of flags of Italy — the red, white, and green — waved in the wind. Flying from every balcony, from every public building, was to be seen the sign of free Italy, Italy that but a few years before had been groaning under the heel of a foreign oppressor.

The streets were crowded with people all going to the same place. There were gentlemen in high silk hats; ladies in spring finery; children in dainty white frocks skipping gayly along in the care of nurses who seemed to have a very hard time keeping them in sight. Some of the nurses wore their holiday costumes —

dark skirts, brilliant waists, white aprons, and huge ribbon bows on their heads, the long streamers floating behind them.

Peasants from the mountains and country places round about had come, some for miles and miles, to see what Italy had done for their *figli soldati*.¹ How

¹ Soldier sons.



picturesque those peasants looked! There were young girls from Castel Delfi, with big sun-bonnets of real old lace, shirred and fluted and stiffly laundered. The older women had strings and strings of *dorini* about their necks. *Dorini* are round beads of thin gold leaf, some as tiny as peas, others as big as walnuts. A few of the women had as many as ten or twelve of these strings. The more they wore, the richer and older was the family tree.

The Three were lucky in having friends who lived in a house near the Piazza. From the windows they had a fine view of the Rivista.¹

Line after line of soldiers stood waiting for the general who was to review them. The Cavalleria² was there, tall soldiers on horse-back, with polished steel helmets that gleamed in the sun and made their wearers look even taller than they really were; the Bersaglieri, in their plumed hats; the Alpini,³ in jaunty feathered caps; and the Fanteria,⁴ the regiment of small men, but as good as any of the



¹ Review. ³ Alpine troops.

² Cavalry. ⁴ Infantry.

others. Riding up and down the sides of the Square went the Carabinieri, spick and span and seemingly very proud of their strange triangle hats, decorated with a red, white, and blue pompon.

A bugle sounded. The fanfare played. Then the "Royal March" began. Every line straightened; every man stood motionless at attention; every eye looked straight ahead. The general had come and the Rivista had begun.

At a given command each line moved forward. One by one they filed by, some walking, some trotting, others galloping. As they watched, the Three thrilled with pride in them and in the Italy that had such fine soldiers to defend her freedom.

The parade over, they went home with hearts glowing with love for Italia.

"Oh, if only I were grown up," sighed Paolo, as he walked along beside Bianca.

"Why? What would you do?"

"Oh, *bella!*¹ I'd be a Bersagliere, of course."

"But the Bersaglieri have to go to war, and sometimes they get killed."

"Yes, but il Nonno says it is an honor to

¹ Well, well!

die for your country, when your country needs you."

"Anyway, you will have to wait ever and ever so long, fratellino. You are so little."

"Not if *Italia Bella*¹ needs me, sorellina mia," answered the gallant little fellow. "In 1848 and 1860, even little boys were soldiers, you know."

My beautiful Italy.



CHAPTER XV

A PICNIC TO THE SAGRA

JUNE in Italy, as well as everywhere else, is the month for outdoors, for picnics, for long walks. The Three stayed outdoors, at times, from early morning till late afternoon, wandering through the woods. They were fine walkers, small as they were.

There were many places they had never been to. One of these was the Sagra, an old, old chapel perched on the top of Il Monte, a low mountain peak not very far from Salu.



An old old chapel perched on the top of Il Monte.

Their father and mother had often been up there. They were great mountain climbers, and the Three many a time had asked to go with them.

“Wait till you grow bigger,” their father and mother had always answered. So neither Paolo nor his sisters had ever been members of the happy parties that would sometimes go wandering over the Alps for two or three days at a time. But the stories they heard made the children long to go, and they kept on begging.

A day finally came when they were considered big enough to go as far as the Sagra.

At exactly four o'clock they were awakened, before even the sun was up. That was rather a hard beginning; yet they were playing at being grown up, and so they got up and dressed in time with the others.

The atrio was full of people who were all to be members of the party. A gay crowd it was, — uncles, aunts, big friends, little friends, — and every one chattering and making a dreadful lot of noise. It looked as if they were to have a gay time of it.

Paolo, Clara, and Bianca soon found their friends. Even Tom was not to be alone; an-

other big dog had come, and the two were having a great time tumbling each other around.

Two little donkeys stood at the garden gate, loaded to their ears.

“What are the donkeys for?” Clara asked. “And what are they carrying?”

“They are carrying goodies for dinner. People get hungry when they walk, and we have a long way to go.”

That was good news.

At last all was ready and the party started out, each one carrying a stick to help himself with, going up the steep hills.

Just then the sun came out to keep the wanderers company. The day dawned clear and bright. Not a single cloud marred the summer sky.

The children walked along, merry as birds, so fast at times that they always led the crowd.

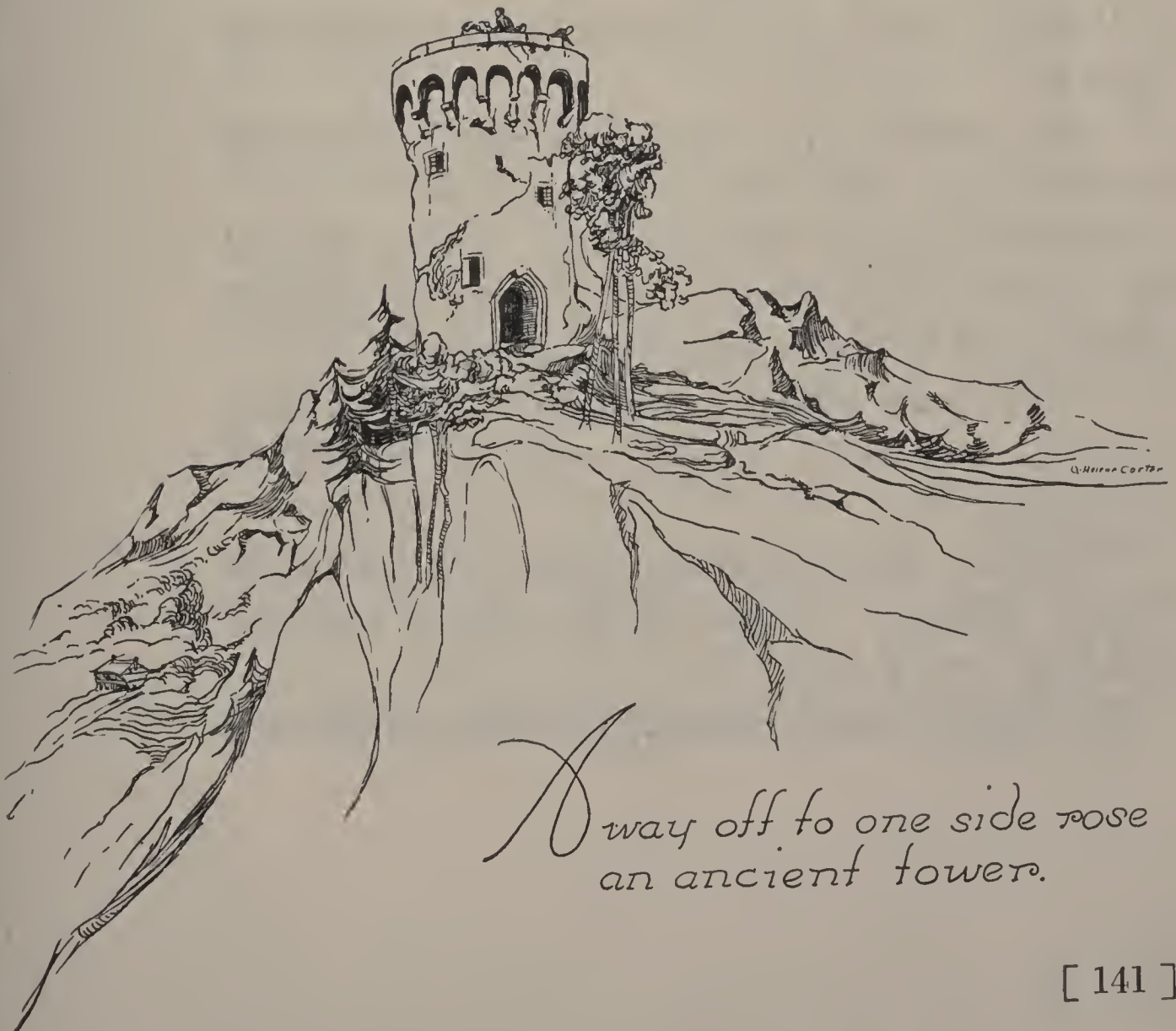
“Not so fast, children, not so fast!” some one would call to them. “You will soon grow tired, if you don’t go more slowly.”

But the warning fell on deaf ears. Up and up they climbed, not even thinking of being tired. Up farther and farther they went, till the path became so narrow that there was just room enough for one person at a time.

“Don’t go too near the edge, or you will fall,” Maesa warned, but no one needed that warning. Every one, big or little, was very careful to keep his eyes on the path.

Toward noon the top of the Monte was reached. The Sagra was in a quiet, lonely spot. Here and there an old ruin stood crumbling to pieces. Near by was the home of the caretakers of the place. That too was old, built centuries before.

Away off to one side rose an ancient tower. It looked very unsteady standing there al-



*Away off to one side rose
an ancient tower.*

most on the edge of the Monte, seeming to look over to see what was happening below.

A young man and his wife were standing at the door of the house as the big party came into sight.

“Come in, come in,” they said in welcome. “You must be tired after your long walk, and hungry too. It will take but a short time to prepare a meal.”

“But we have our dinner with us,” answered the children’s father. “Only let us cook it; that is all we want.”

“That is easy indeed.”

“And have you a table large enough for all of us?”

“No, but we have wooden horses and boards in the yard. We can soon make one.”

Then every one became busy. Some started to build a table, others worked with the dinner; all seemed to be having fun aplenty.

“Now run along, children,” and Clara, Bianca, and their friends went in search of adventure.

“Bianca, Maria, Emilia, Clara,” they heard voices calling. “Come up here all of you and see how lovely it is.”

The girls looked around, but they could not

see Paolo, though they were sure they had heard his voice.

“But where are you?”

“Up here, 'way up here,” came voices far above them.

They looked up and discovered Paolo and his friends on the top of the old tower. The boys had found a winding, rickety old staircase, and had lost no time in using it. Luckily Maesa was with them.

Bianca, Clara, and the others, not to be outdone by the boys, followed them up.

No wonder even Paolo had said it was lovely up there. Clara and Bianca felt, when they stood on the tower, as if they were hanging between earth and sky. At their feet the mountain swept down hundreds and hundreds of feet to the valley below, 'way, 'way below, so far that the farmers in the fields looked like tiny black specks. Little bits of houses, chapels, and farms dotted the hills and valleys for miles and miles.

A white road stretched out so straight that it looked like a ribbon of light. A river flowed where the sun, playing with it, turned it into silver. Round about stood the Alps, stern and forbidding, like giants guarding some treasure.

Flocks of goats and sheep wandered over the mountain sides, the tinkle of their bells mingling with the song of the shepherd and the sound of falling water, which showed as a gleam of white among the trees.

Little as they were, the Three could not help watching the picture, for it was a beautiful one, and Italian children love beauty as much as do their parents.

But then a sound came that made them forget picture and beauty and made them remember only that they were very hungry. A big bell, the call to dinner, was heard, and down the rickety stairs, with shouts and laughter, tumbled the crowd.

The table, big enough for everybody, looked more than inviting, set under the trees and loaded with good things to eat. The children were as hungry as little bears and ate everything in sight. There was just enough left when they were through for Tom and his dog friend to have a good feast.

The day passed in play and happy times till the call came to go home. Still eager, the children started. But even children can get tired of play, and Clara and Bianca proved it. How did they reach home? Fast asleep on the backs of the two little donkeys.

CHAPTER XVI

A H A I L S T O R M

THE day was a stifling one in the middle of July. Not a breath of air was stirring the trees, and the cloudless sky was hot and dry.

Long before noon the Three, with Lisa and Maesa, had started out in search of coolness.

“If a storm should come up, be sure to stop at some farmhouse. Don’t try to reach home, if you are too far away.”

The Three had heard their mother give this warning to Lisa, as they started out. Afterward they remembered it.

The hills were much cooler than the plains, and the children walked on as far as the spring, one of their favorite nooks in the woods. The spot was a pretty one. A stream of clear, cold water gushed out of the hillside and gave the place its name. It not only gave drink to thirsty throats but kept the spot delightfully cool, even on the hottest of days.

Luncheon over, the children felt so tired that while Lisa and Maesa talked and read, they curled up and went to sleep. But in a very short while Lisa shook them awake. They

opened sleepy eyes and were surprised to see how dark it had become.

“What is the matter?” they asked, their eyes growing big with fright.

“It looks like a storm,” Lisa answered. “Come, we must hurry home before the rain.”

Paolo, Clara, and Bianca were wide awake and out on the road before Lisa was through speaking. But home was far away, and a storm was certainly brewing very, very near. A cold wind had suddenly sprung up. Dark, black clouds, heavy with rain, were hurrying from the mountains. In the distance the low mutter of thunder was heard.

“We shall never reach the villa in time,” said Maesa. “The Cascina Rossa ¹ is near by. Let us hurry to it and wait there till the storm has passed.”

The Cascina was reached in a few minutes. It was an old farmhouse, but a cheerful place just now, glowing in its best summer dress. The apricots showed rich and golden, the peaches were almost ripe, the apples, the plums, and the grapes would soon be ready for the harvest. The wheat had been cut and gathered into the barns ready for the thresher.

¹ The Red Farmhouse.

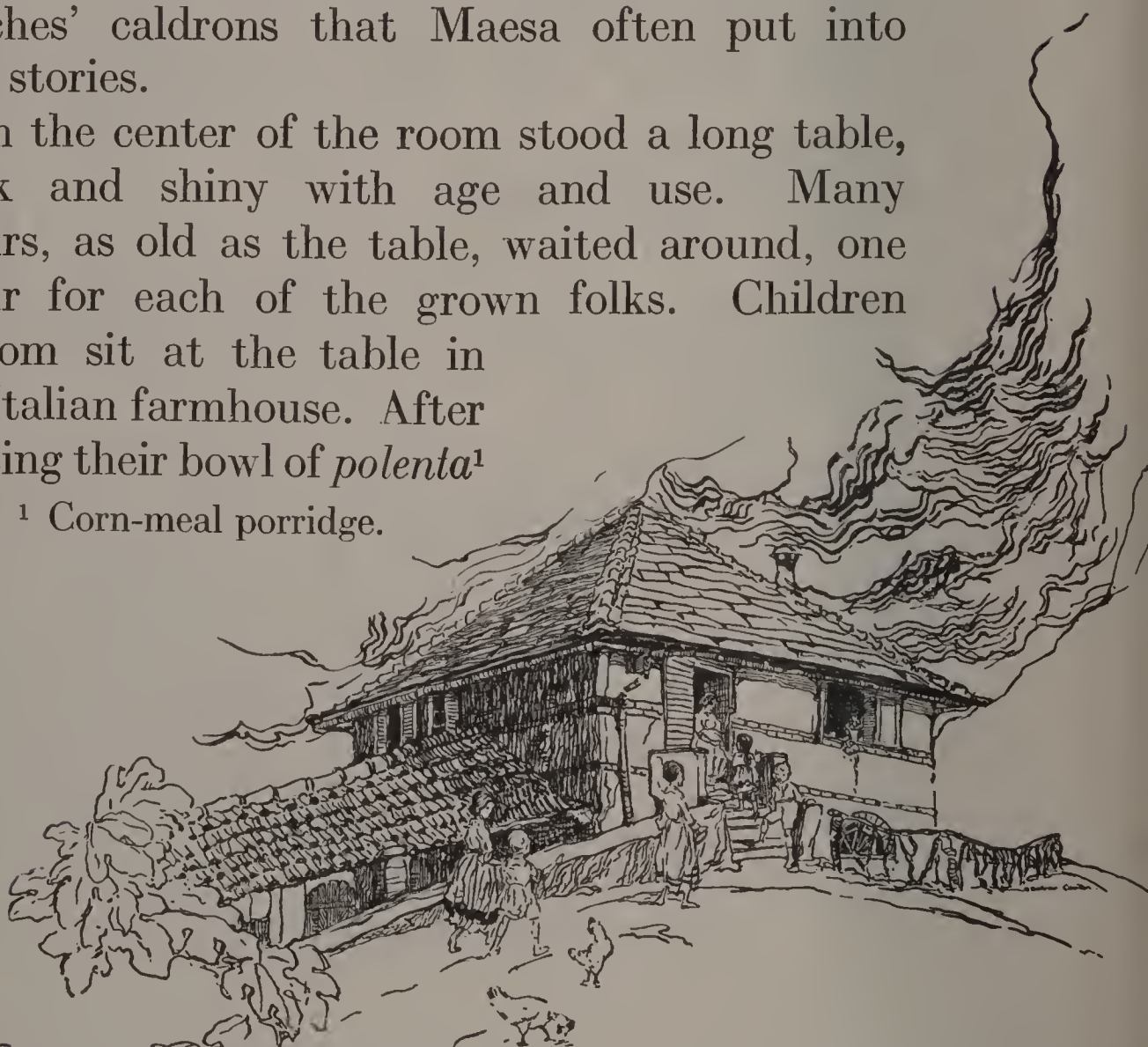
The peasants greeted the party with smiles of welcome.

“We are glad to give you shelter,” they said. “The storm is to be a heavy one. Come in and wait.”

They ushered their guests into a big room, the dining room, living-room, and kitchen all in one. A great black fireplace at one side of the room, with two huge black pots hanging from tripods, made the Three think of the witches’ caldrons that Maesa often put into her stories.

In the center of the room stood a long table, dark and shiny with age and use. Many chairs, as old as the table, waited around, one chair for each of the grown folks. Children seldom sit at the table in an Italian farmhouse. After getting their bowl of *polenta*¹

¹ Corn-meal porridge.



*The Carcina Rosa was reached
in a few minutes.*

and milk, or of *insalata*,¹ the little ones usually scamper off to a favorite nook of their own to eat—it may be the front stoop, the barn ladder, or the green fields.

Each place at the table was marked by a wooden bowl, a wooden spoon, and a wooden fork. In the middle of the table stood another bowl, much, much bigger than the others. Dinner was still far away, but the table was set and waiting.

The raftered ceiling also was blackened with age and by the smoke of many centuries. Each rafter was turned into a pantry. From one hung long salami, the delicious Italian sausage that one can get only from an Italian peasant. From others hung bunches of red and yellow peppers, drying for the winter; onions braided together; golden corn and other vegetables. Many of the rafters held the big loaves of bread, the main food of Italian peasant folk. These loaves are baked only once or twice a week, and are placed up there to keep them out of the way of hungry children, perhaps.

“Are you not hungry, signorini?”

Paolo, Clara, and Bianca thought the ques-

¹ Salad.

tion a welcome one, and they hastened to take the seats offered to them at the table.

In a few moments a delicious luncheon was set before them. There were bowls of milk, heavy with cream and still warm from the milking. There were dainty cheese patties made from goat's milk; and very inviting they were, served on cool green vine leaves. Brown bread with the sweetest of home-made butter was there, too. Everything tasted so good that for a while the brewing storm outside was forgotten.

But the Three were soon reminded of it again. A glance at the windows and at the open door showed that the peasants had been right in saying the storm was to be a heavy one.

Rolling black clouds looked threateningly down on the earth. The wind that had so suddenly sprung up had as suddenly died down again. Not a leaf stirred, not a bird twittered. The only sound was the low growl of the thunder, which at times rolled and crashed and roared till the very ground was shaking. Now and again a swallow darted out of its shelter to skim the ground in its low flight; but frightened at the darkness, it would fly back to the nest it had left.

A blinding flash of lightning, a deafening clap of thunder, and the storm started. Big, round drops of rain began to pitter-patter on the dust outside, scattered at first, then thicker and faster, till the rain came down in sheets on the parched and thirsty earth.

If that had been all, how grateful the earth would have been for the relief the rain had brought. But that was not all. The hail, that dreaded scourge of northern Italy, came that afternoon, and none of those who lived that day will ever forget it.

Just as the storm seemed about to blow over, heavy light-gray clouds came tumbling over the mountains. The peasants turned pale. They knew what those light-gray clouds meant. They knew only too well.

“*La tempesta! Dio ci salvi!*”¹ they prayed.

Some prayed, some wept. The Three stood by, too frightened even to ask what it all meant.

In a little while they knew what the matter was. Small white balls began to fall thick and fast. They did not seem so bad at first, but as the minutes passed they grew bigger and bigger. From the size of a pea, they be-

¹ The hail! May God help us!

came like marbles, then like pebbles, and still they grew bigger. Later Paolo found one hailstone as big as a small egg.

Down they came without mercy or pity of any kind. They seemed so many fiends, wicked, cruel, bent on destruction. They beat down the pretty green leaves of the trees; they tore the peaches, the plums, the figs, the grapes, and knocked them dying on the ground. They even killed the little birds in their nests where they had been so happy.

In fifteen short minutes, everything lay on the ground, torn, broken, trampled. And then all was over. Once more the sky became blue; the sun smiled as before. But oh, on what a different world! From midsummer to midwinter in fifteen short minutes! The ground white as though covered with snow, the trees bare, the fields laid waste!

Is it any wonder those poor peasants stood as if turned to stone with grief? Their hard work of many months was all wiped out. Nothing was left on their farm.

“Let us thank God that the wheat is cut and safe in the barns,” said one old woman. That was the only word spoken.

A wagon took the Three to the villa. They

were very quiet and very sad. The world had been so beautiful that morning; now it was dead.

"I wonder what has happened to our flowers," said Paolo. But his sisters said nothing. They were afraid even to think of that.

When they reached home, what a wreck they found! Their garden, their beautiful playland of flowers, lay white and shattered under the merciless hailstones. The roses were dead; the jasmine bower, under which they had had so many happy lunches, was a mass of ruins.

The Three rushed to their mother, who was anxiously awaiting them, and in her arms they



sobbed out the grief with which their hearts were filled at the havoc the storm had wrought.

“But, mother, why, why did it have to happen?” asked Bianca, in a heart-broken little voice.

“God sends troubles as well as joys, piccola. We must not complain. Think of the poor peasants. They are the ones to be pitied, not we. They have worked so hard, and now they have nothing left. Think how poor and miserable they will be this winter.”

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE SEASHORE

THE Three were such unhappy youngsters when the storm wiped their beloved garden away, that to make them forget their troubles their father and mother decided to take them for a month's vacation to the Italian Riviera.

There was much bustling about, there were many hours of traveling. Then Paolo, Clara, and Bianca woke up early one morning in a small, white room that was full of sunshine.

"Where are we? How did we get here?" they asked each other, sitting up in bed to look around.



“Lisa, Lisa!” they called, and as she came in, they remembered the long journey, the train, how tired they had been at the journey’s end, and how they had all fallen asleep.

In a twinkling they scampered out of bed and ran to the windows to find out what the sea was like.

“Tomorrow we shall all bathe in the sea,” their father had told them the day before.

“In the sea? Is the sea like a bathtub?” Clara had asked.

“Something like it, only so much bigger that we shall all go in together,” had been the laughing reply.

Now, as the Three stood at the windows,



the sea lay before them in the magic beauty of the Mediterranean, blue as sapphire, golden as sunshine where the sun touched it, wide, lovely, never ending it seemed.

“It looks like the sky,” Clara said.

“Or like a field of cornflowers,” Paolo added.

From another window there were glimpses of the lovely shore line, of the dark hills and rocks rising straight out of the water.

“It is more beautiful than Salu, isn’t it, Lisa?” asked Bianca.

Bianca was right. The Italian Riviera is a very beautiful place. It is that part of the Italian peninsula that lies by the waters of the Mediterranean and near the city of Genoa.

Noli was the name of the little village the Three were looking at. It was a fishing place, with narrow, crooked streets, lined with weather-beaten old houses, baked brown by the sun of many centuries. Summer cottages and pretty villas had been built both along the shore and on the green hillsides.

Lisa hurried her charges into their clothes, and they were ready in record time.

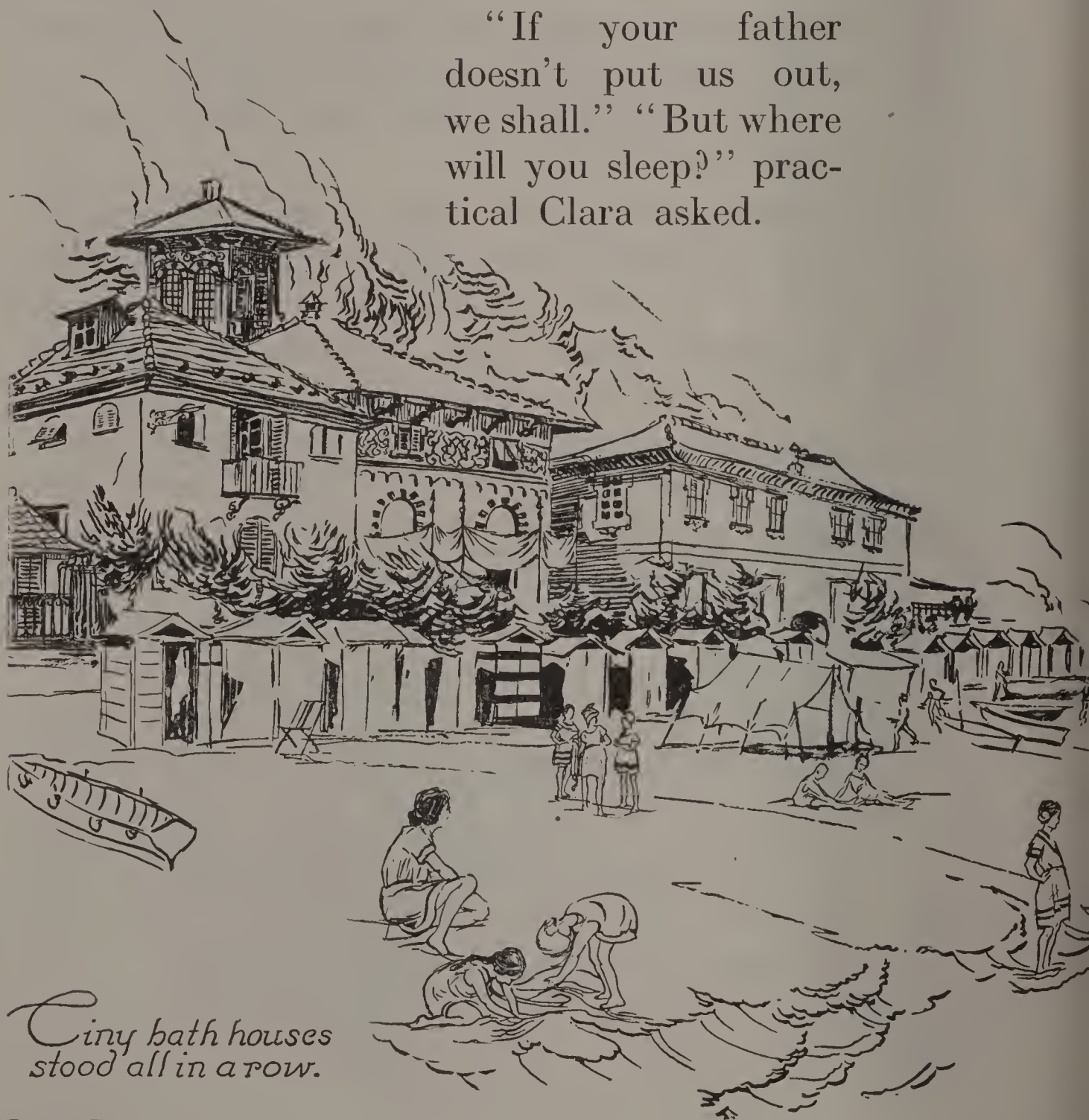
In the breakfast room a big surprise was awaiting them. Uncle Sandro, Aunt Clelia, Letizia, and Alberto were sitting at the table, looking very much at home.

“And when did you come?” asked Bianca from her perch on her uncle’s knee.

“Last night, just as three little sleepyheads were put fast asleep into bed,” laughed Uncle Sandro.

“And are you going to be with us all the time?”

“If your father doesn’t put us out, we shall.” “But where will you sleep?” practical Clara asked.



*Tiny bath houses
stood all in a row.*

“That’s easy. You, Paolo, and Bianchina here can sleep in the cellar, and I’ll sleep in your room.”

The Three knew then that he was teasing as usual.

Breakfast over, they went exploring the new home. The house had plenty of bright, cheerful rooms, enough for everybody, and a garden full of palm trees, orange and lemon trees, and flowers of every shape and color. Shady gravel paths wound in and out, well kept and delightful. One path led to the shore. Another ran alongside the sea, overlooking it.

About ten o’clock, Lisa took the children to the bathing beach. Tiny bath houses stood all in a row, waiting for the bathers. Even at that early hour the sea was full of bathers, and it did not take long for the Three and their cousins to join them. But that first day they did not enjoy their bath any too well. However, little by little they began to love bathing and swimming and romping about in the sea, and after a while it was hard work to get them away.

The bagnino — that is, the life saver — became a stanch friend. He had been a sailor, had traveled over many seas, had seen almost

the whole world. He was burned dark by the sun of many countries and looked very handsome, with his flashing black eyes and white teeth that gleamed like pearls as he talked and laughed with the children. Boys and girls on the shore listened to him by the hour as he told of his adventures, while he helped them to build towns of sand and bridges of mud.

The early afternoons were spent in sleep. Everybody sleeps for an hour or so after dinner in very hot countries. This is called the *siesta*, which means “rest.”

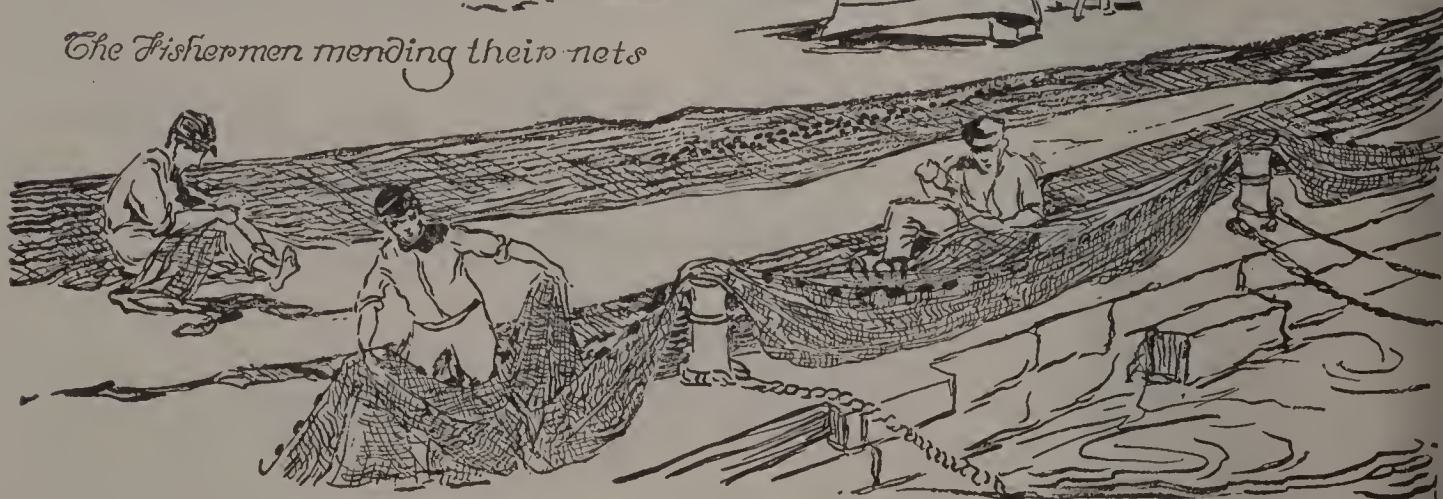
After the siesta came another bath, and then long walks along the rocky shore, in search of sea treasures — *stelle marine*,¹ *ricci di mare*,² and seashells. These last fascinated the Three.

“Put the shell to your ear,” the bagnino had told

¹ Starfish.

² Sea-nettles.

The Fishermen mending their nets



them. "If you are as still as a fairy, you will hear the song of the sea nymphs."

The children really believed that the sound they heard was the song of the sea fairies.

The fishermen of Noli lived in tiny huts. The Three and their cousins liked to visit them, as they worked busily away, some mending nets, others weaving new ones, and still others packing fish that was to be sent off to Genoa.

Each evening the boats put out to sea. Sometimes thirty or forty of them went together. The young boys often went with their fathers, and the mothers would stand on the shore and watch till even the tiniest speck had disappeared.

One morning the children got up early enough to see the boats come in. It was a pretty sight to see the bright-colored sails blown by the wind, the boats turned into magic vessels by the sun as they came in from the far away.

The few weeks passed like lightning. Just as the Three were about to bid little Noli goodby, the village festa took place. For a day Noli arrayed itself in holiday dress to do honor to its favorite saint.

On the great day all the people of the village seemed to be gathered together, in the village piazza, or square. From early morning till late at night they were there, taking part in all the contests, the races, the songs, and the dances.

The Three, of course, were there, too. One contest held them spellbound. It was called climbing the Tree of Plenty. Five poles stood on one side of the piazza, tall and polished and waxed till they were as slippery as glass. On the top of each pole hung a large earthen jar, filled with all kinds of goodies — chickens, hams, sweets, what not? For two soldi any one in the crowd could have the goodies. But

he had to climb the Tree first, and then he had to break the jar with a stick he carried in his mouth as he climbed.

It was hard work, yet many tried it. Some went up one foot, some two. Others would almost reach the top, only to come



The Tarantella

whizzing down at express speed. How every one did enjoy it! When, after many an effort, five young fellows did succeed in getting the coveted jars, gay cheers followed the victory.

In the evening the children were allowed to sit up to see the illumination. About eight o'clock the vil-

lage was turned as if by magic into a fairy city. Hundreds and hundreds of lanterns burned everywhere among the trees. Strung on wires criss-crossing the streets, thousands of tiny lights gleamed in the shadowy night.

And the sea! Numberless colored lights floated on its surface, and as they appeared and disappeared with the waves, they looked like water-lilies made of fire. Dark boats, with dark sails flying, glided in and out among them. Happy people filled them, singing happy songs. Now and again a boat brilliant





with lights came up. Was it the Queen of the Lilies come out of the waves to visit her subjects?

Later the moon rose from the sea and made the soft sand into a carpet of gold for the fisher folk, as they danced and whirled about in the figures of the folk dance of Italy, the Tarantella.

That night as they slept, the Three dreamed of nothing but lights, lilies, and fairy boats floating in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE ALPS

PACKING was going on, in preparation for leaving the seashore and returning to Salu. Though happy at the idea of seeing Salu again, the Three did not enjoy the thought of leaving little Noli.

Then a letter came that changed things.

“What is il Nonno saying that you look so happy, Mammina?” Clara asked.

“He wants us to visit him at the *Eremo*¹ for two weeks.”

“Of course we are going,” said Paolo.

“It seems so from the way you speak,” his mother laughed happily.

The Nonno’s home, the Eremo, was far up in the Alps, near France. The Three had often heard their mother speak of the place, but they had never seen it. They knew that the Nonno loved it so much that he even lived in it, at times, during the cold winter months.

The trip from Noli to the Eremo was a long one. It took the Three from the Riviera, with its warm sunshine and glinting sea, high up into the mountains, the highest in Europe,

¹The Hermitage.

with tops white with snow and sides covered with pine woods.

At the little station of Aosta the Nonno was waiting. He took the Three in his arms and kissed them and held them close, as if he could never let them go.

“And now come,” he said finally, “the Eremo is waiting for you.”

Pietro, the Nonno’s old servant, who had grown up with him, drove the party up the road that led to the house, a steep mountain-road with cliffs frowning on one side and a deep precipice on the other.

After an hour’s ride, the Eremo was reached. It had a good name, for it stood all by itself, very stern and very quiet. Pine trees, great old trees, centuries old, stood round about, grim and forbidding. The place had once been a convent of monks and the Nonno had bought it from them, for he liked its solemn, lonely look.

The Three found the house as strangely silent inside as it had been outside. There were great, high walls that ended in darkness; marble stairs that told children not to run or they would fall; white, ghostly marble figures that gleamed in dark corners; tall windows

that looked like those of the cathedral at home. For a few days Paolo and his sisters felt lost in the big place, but the Nonno soon made them forget their fear and awe, and after those few days the Eremo became a new home to them.

The Nonno took his three little friends into every room, into every corner. He told funny stories of the Three's mother, when she was little, and these stories made the children love their Mammina more than ever.

The tall peaks that rose high and steep about the Eremo were the Nonno's great friends, as he called them.

"See, children," he said, pointing to the highest one of all. "That is Mont Blanc. It rises on the boundary line of Italy and France, and is the highest peak in Europe. Many people have died trying to climb it.



There the monks of San Bernardo live in their convent.



And that other high mountain yonder is the Gran San Bernardo. There the monks of San Bernardo live in their convent and train dogs to save the lives of the lost wanderers on the Alps."

"Will you take us to see the dogs?" Bianca asked hopefully.

"No, Ninette, I am sure your legs would

never carry you so high. The road — or path, rather — to the place is very steep.”

“When are you all going?” The Three knew well that their father and mother would soon start climbing.

“Tomorrow morning. But as we are to start at three o’clock, when little folks are still asleep, you will not even see us go.”

“And what will you bring us?”

“Oh, many things. *Dolci di Svizzera*,¹ *fiori d’Italia*,² and a San Bernardo puppy, if you want it.”

The next morning, when the Three awoke, the party had gone. Lisa took her charges on a long ramble through cool, shadowy pine-woods in search of cyclamens, the wild mountain blossoms that bloom thick and fragrant on the slopes of the Alps.

Evening came, but the Nonno had not yet returned; so the children had a lonely dinner and then were sent to bed, their hopes of seeing the new puppy gone for the day.

The next morning the Three heard that the wanderers had returned at midnight. They went in search of their grandfather and found him in his garden.

¹ Swiss candy.

² Flowers of Italy.

“Did you bring us the candy? And the flowers? And the puppy?” they asked all at once.

“Didn’t you want a story too? Sit here and I’ll tell it first. You shall have candy and flowers and puppy later.”

The Three settled themselves, Bianca on her Nonno’s knee, Paolo and Clara at his feet.

“We started very early,” he began. “It was still night and a fine rain was falling, as we got into the carriage for the ride to San Remy.”

“It wasn’t raining when we got up,” said Clara, interrupting.

“I knew the rain would stop,” continued the Nonno. “Here in the mountains a morning rain never lasts long. About five o’clock a high wind blew all the clouds away, and the day dawned bright and beautiful. Every peak grew rosy or gold under the sun’s good-morning kiss, every pine shook itself awake and smiled a welcome to the new day.

“At nine o’clock we reached San Remy. We had breakfast at the small inn there, for we were both cold and hungry from the long ride.

“After breakfast we started up the moun-

tain on foot. The path from San Remy is so steep that no horse can climb it. The only animals that do climb it are the mountain mules that carry supplies up to the friars.

“We climbed till twelve. Toward the end, the path became very slippery from the newly fallen snow. Just before reaching the convent, we came to a large stone, lying by the road. It had a huge pair of shears carved on it.”

“What are they for?” Paolo asked.

“They mark the very spot that divides Italy from Switzerland. The Gran San Bernardo is not in Italy, but in Switzerland.

“On the stroke of twelve we entered the gate of the hospice. The monks welcomed us and invited us in to dinner. We were indeed glad to accept, for the long walk had given us a hearty appetite.

“A delicious dinner was served us, but when we asked for the bill, the friars only smiled.

“‘We want no money for a kindness to a fellow traveler,’ they said. ‘If you give us something to help our hospital, we shall be glad of your offering.’”

“They must have lots of money,” said Paolo.

“No, they have not. They spend all they

have in taking care of the people they find lost on the mountains in winter."

"When I grow big, I'll go to the San Bernardo every day for my dinner," Clara said. "Then I won't have to spend any money for eating."

"Yes, young lady. But I am afraid you will have to spend it in buying shoes," laughed her grandfather.

"Dinner over, the friars took us through their home. It is a wonderful home, high up near the sky, with the world lying at its feet."

"But don't they ever get lonesome?" Bianca asked.

"No, they are too busy to be lonesome. They have their house and their chapel to take care of, and their dogs and their garden."

"A garden? You said it was so cold up there that the snow lay on the ground. How can a garden grow in the snow?"

"But the garden is all covered with glass, and so flowers and vegetables can grow there the whole year through."

"What else do the friars do?"

"In winter, very often, they have sick people to take care of, the people the dogs find on the Alps, at times buried deep in the snow."

“Did you see the dogs?”

“Yes, indeed, we saw them. There were many of them, perhaps thirty or forty; great, big, fuzzy animals, as big as that Tom you tell me of and that I am soon going to see. They seemed very happy to see us, and welcomed us in a boisterous dog way. Each animal carried a small case tied about its neck. These small cases are filled with medicine, when the dogs go out in search of lost people. One dog there has saved as many as thirty lives.”

“Then did you come home?”

“No. Before we left for home, we were taken to see the convent chapel. The friars are very proud of it, and justly so, for they have built it themselves. The pews and the woodwork all around are hand-carved and show the patient work of many years.

“At sunset we bade the friars goodby, bought a few things at a little store, and then came home.”

“And what did you buy in the store?” asked Bianca, hopefully.

“Come and I’ll show you.”

The Three needed no coaxing. In the house they found the chocolate, the sweets, the

mountain edelweiss, and a San Bernardo puppy, a dear, frolicking little creature, with great brown eyes, soft as velvet, rough brown hair, and a tongue twice as long as its body — at least, it looked so every time it came wriggling out to kiss one or the other of three adoring new friends.

“May we keep him?” Clara asked.

“Surely; it is yours.” The Nonno believed in never refusing anything.

But at the end of two happy weeks the Three were persuaded to leave the new pup behind.

“Tom would eat him up,” said their father, and that was a fearful thing even to think of. So the puppy was left at the Eremo until he could grow large enough to play safely with big Tom.



The mountain Edelweiss

CHAPTER XIX

A TRIP TO AMERICA

OCTOBER found the Three again in Salu, busy with study, work, and play.

For a few short years their life of bright, happy childhood was spent at the Villa Grande, in the sweet companionship of one another and of their father and mother. Year by year their parents grew nearer and dearer to them, as they shared work and play with them.

Then one day the Three said goodby to Italia, the beloved land of their very young days, and sailed away for a new land called America.

Lisa, their faithful nurse and companion, went with them, for she loved them too well to stay behind. But Tom, the great dog-friend, stayed in Italy, for he was too big to



go traveling. He was missed for many a day, and he missed his three little friends, too.

“Tom looks for you everywhere,” their uncle wrote. “He seems to grow old, now that you children are no longer here to play with him.”

The first stop on the long journey was Paris, the great French capital, so big and noisy that it made the Three’s heads ache.

From Paris the children went on to Havre. They had not been told where they were going, and they wondered where their father and mother could be taking them to.

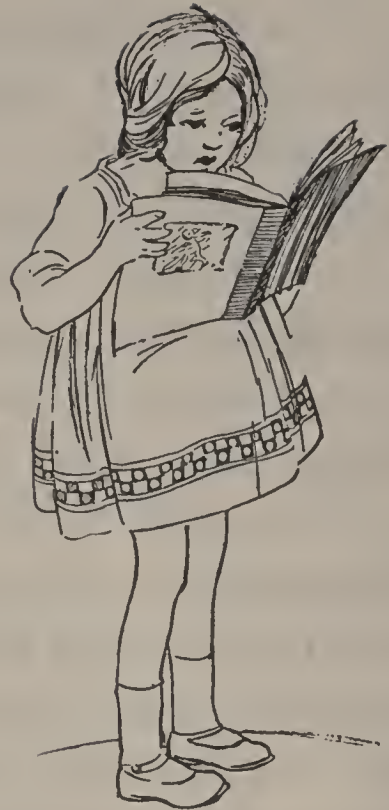
On the train to Havre they found out.

“Tomorrow morning we shall take a big ship to America,” their father told them.

“To America?” said Paolo. “But that is where the *Pelli Rossi*¹ live.”

“Yes,” laughed their father, “but America has also its big cities, its schools, its little children who look just like you.”

¹ Redskins.



Yet even that speech did not entirely satisfy the Three or scatter away their fears. The thought of the Indians of their storybooks still bothered them. They talked it over and over among themselves and wondered what could be the matter with their father, that he was taking them away from their beautiful Italy, to a wild land where the Indians lived.

The sight of the big ship waiting for them at Havre gave them a new surprise. The roomy cabins, the long deck, the wide stretch of water, and the heavy storm that tossed the ship about like a leaf in the wind, filled the world with new things for seven days.

The last piece of news was given one morning at breakfast:

“Children, you will have to learn English.”



*Then one day the Three sailed
away for a new land called America..*

“English? And what is that?”

“A new way of talking,” explained their father.

“Don’t people in America understand Italian?”

“A few of them do; not very many. Most of them speak English.”

“What fun,” said Paolo. “We’ll run a race to see who learns it first.”

One sunny morning the ship entered the big harbor of New York. As they stood on the deck, the Three knew that America had big cities too, bigger than those of Italy.

The next day their American life had begun.

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THE ALO MAN

STORIES FROM THE CONGO

By MARA L. PRATT-CHADWICK and L. LAMPREY

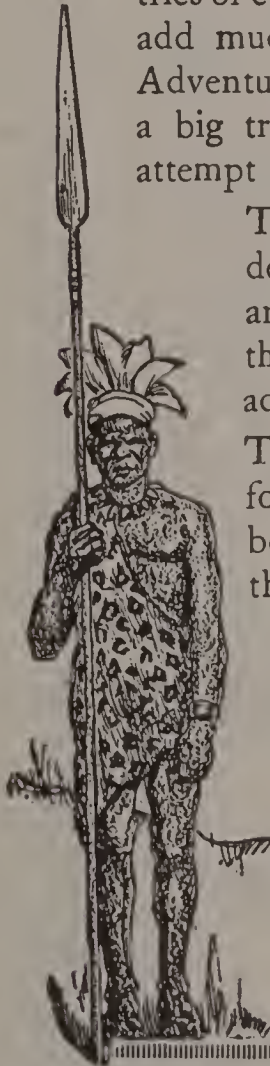
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